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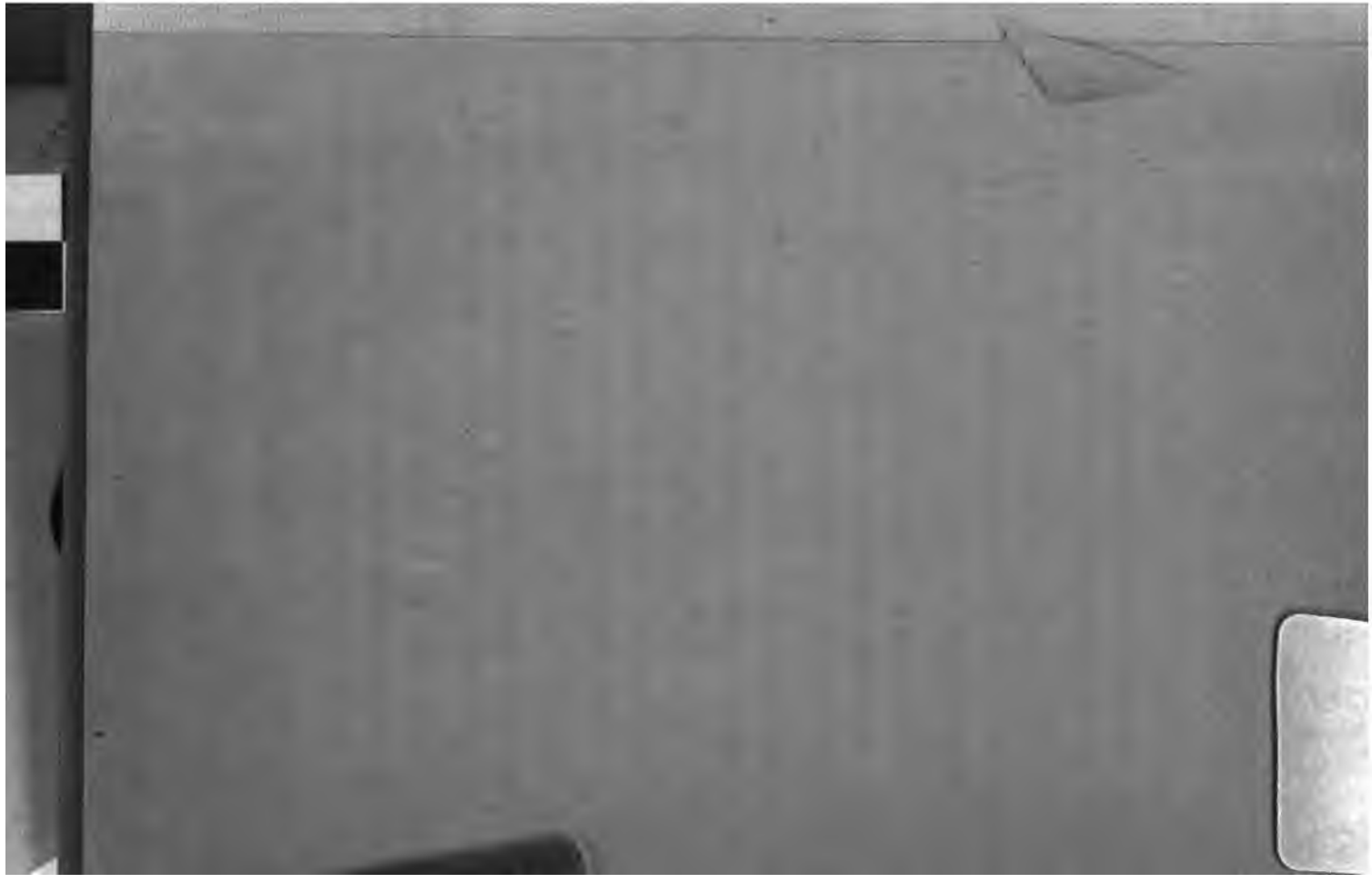
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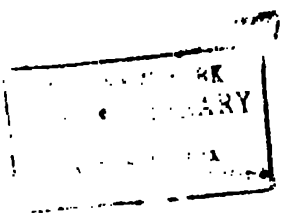











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"Oh, May, we have heard all about it; and we are *so* sorry." — *Page 7*

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ANOTHER FLOCK OF GIRLS.

BY

NORA PERRY,

AUTHOR OF

A FLOCK OF GIRLS, FOR A WOMAN, AFTER THE BALL,

THE YOUNGEST MISS LORTON, ETC.

Illustrated.

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MAY BARTLETT'S STEPMOTHER.

CHAPTER I.



"A STEPMOTHER? How horrid!"

"Horrid! I should think so."

"What is it that is horrid, girls?" asked another girl, who, in passing, had caught only the last sentence.

"Why, about May Bartlett, you know."

"No, I don't know; what is it?"

"She has a stepmother."

"No!"

"Yes, yes," cried the first two speakers, — the Macy sisters, Joanna and Elsie.

"But when, *when* did it happen, this stepmother business?" exclaimed the girl to whom they were telling the

news. "I saw May in vacation, and she didn't lisp a word of it."

"But you haven't seen her since you came back?"

"Well, no; as this is my first *hour* back, almost. But tell me when the stepmother was brought on the scene?"

"A week ago, — that is, Mr. Bartlett was married to her then; but he hasn't brought her home yet. They are travelling."

"Who told you?"

"Mrs. Marks, the housekeeper. I went round yesterday to see if May was at home."

"And you saw May?"

"No; she wasn't expected until the late afternoon train."

"And she didn't know anything about the stepmother until a week ago?"

"Two weeks ago; a week before the marriage."

"Well, I call that downright cruel. If it was *my* father!" And Cathy Bond stamped a little foot on the floor with an emphasis that spoke unutterable things. Two or three more girls who had just entered the school-

room came up at this demonstration with a "What's the matter, Cathy?" And the matter was told over again with a new chorus of "ohs" and "ahs" and "poor Mays." There was only one disagreeing voice, — a soft little voice that broke into the "ohs" and "ahs," saying, "Stepmothers are very nice sometimes. I have a cousin —"

"Nice!" cried Cathy, and then directly went off in a flow of wild talk, — a string of stories all going to show that stepmothers were anything but nice.

At the first hint of a pause, the little soft voice began again, —

"I have a cousin —" but Cathy had mounted her hobby-horse of prejudice, and flashed out, —

"Oh, bother your cousin, Susy Morris; I know two girls *intimately*, who have stepmothers, and they can't do anything, not *anything*, they want to do!"

"Who, the stepmothers?" asked Joanna, slyly.

"No; the girls, of course," answered Cathy, rather crossly. "And they used to have everything, and do just *exactly* as they pleased. Oh, you need n't talk

to *me* about stepmothers; they interfere between the fathers and children, and are a meddling, selfish set."

As Cathy paused to take breath, Susy promptly struck in with, "I have a cousin — " but a shout of laughter interrupted, and Joanna Macy repeated, with merry mockery, "I have a cousin;" then, turning and clutching Susy in a swift embrace, she cried out, —

"Oh, you dear, queer, funny little thing, with your running chorus, 'I have a cousin. But tell us about her. Come, Susy has the floor; Susy's going to tell us about the cousin. If Cathy interrupts, we 'll put her out. Now, Susy, begin, 'I have a cousin.' "

Susy blushed a little, but without any sign of annoyance unhesitatingly took up the words, "I have a cousin," and went on with her story.

It was a sweet little story of kindness and comfort and happiness brought into a lonely home to a lonely child, by a sweet, kind, good woman.

But it did not make the impression it ought to have made upon the girl listeners, for Cathy's stormy talk of injustice and cruelty had blown into their minds a tangle

of wild thoughts, just as a storm in Nature blows all the wild weeds and sticks and stones into a tangle of dust and dirt that confuses and blinds one.

Susy, who appeared so slow and placid, had a keen perception of some things. Her mind was like a little clear lake through which she seemed to look and see the truth. Through this clear little lake she now looked and saw that not one of these girls, not even Joanna, whom she specially loved, received her story with much belief. It was not that they thought she was wilfully telling what was not true, but they were saying to themselves, —

"Oh, that is only Susy's easy, pleasant way of taking people. Susy does n't understand." But Susy *did* understand more than they imagined; and it was out of this understanding that she started up suddenly with a quicker motion than was common with her, and in a quicker tone cried out, —

"My father says that prejudice makes people deaf and blind." She paused a second, gave a short sigh, and dropping into her ordinary manner, and in her little soft,

drawling voice, she added, "If 't would only make 'em dumb, 't would be all right."

The girls were used to Susy's wise speeches, spoken in that soft voice of hers, and with a curious twist to the letter *r*, which she could n't pronounce without giving to it a half sound of *w*; and they generally laughed, not at the speeches alone, but at the quaint combination of the speeches and Susy together. As a matter of habit they laughed now; but Joanna had caught the spirit of the speech, and she followed the laugh by saying, —

"Susy is right; prejudice does make us deaf and blind, and it is a pity we could n't be dumb too, instead of talking such stuff! What do *we* know really about stepmothers?"

"We know what everybody has always said," struck in Cathy.

"Everybody is always saying everything."

"But there are the Longley girls, — my two friends I told you of."

"And there is Susy's cousin; that 's the other side. I 'll set that against the Longlegs, or whatever is their name."

"Well, I sha'n't. I shall never believe in stepmothers; I know —"

A quick "hush" from Joanna arrested Cathy's sentence. She looked up. They all looked up; and there was May Bartlett, not three feet away! How long had she been there? How much had she heard? Perhaps she had just come in and had heard nothing. But she was standing at her desk, and her books were unstrapped and set in order. She must have heard something in this time. Joanna could have stamped with vexation at herself, and at the others. Oh, why, why, had she — had they all — been so careless? But something must be done. Somebody must go forward and speak as if nothing had happened. Joanna started on this errand, but Cathy was before her, and in the next moment, flinging her arms about May, was saying in an impressive, pitying accent, —

"Oh, May, we have heard all about it; and we are *so* sorry."

May Bartlett was a proud girl, who generally held her private affairs in a good deal of reserve, but this sudden

demonstration at this time was too much for her self-control, and she burst into tears. Joanna could have beaten Cathy. Why could n't she have greeted May as if nothing had happened? But that was just like Cathy, to make a scene.

The girls came forward awkwardly after this, and there was a general uncomfortable time, until Susy suddenly burst out in her odd little way, —

"Oh, May 's got a straight bang!"

The girls giggled; Joanna caught Susy in a little hug; and the tragic atmosphere was relieved.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK later, May Bartlett was standing at the parlor window waiting for her father and his new wife, her stepmother.

"Why don't you go to the depot to meet them?" asked Mrs. Marks.

May had colored up angrily at this question, and a hot rush of tears had blinded her eyes as she turned away without answering. But it was a natural question for Mrs. Marks to ask, for May had been in the habit of meeting her father at the pretty little suburban station almost every afternoon on his return from the city. "But meet *them* at the depot! How could Mrs. Marks speak of such a thing!" the girl thought indignantly.

Tick, tack, tick, tack, went the little cathedral clock on the mantel. In fifteen minutes the train would be in, and in five, ten minutes more the carriage would be at the door, and then — and then — the tears that May had

tried to keep under control suddenly overflowed, as she imagined the change that was coming. Eight weeks ago, when she had gone away with her Aunt Mary to the sea-shore to spend her vacation, May had planned what she would do in the autumn. In the first place, she would have a party, — a garden-party, for September was a lovely month at Hillside, and her father had promised her a garden-party ever since they had taken possession of their new house there, three years ago. She would invite all the girls of her set at the Hillside Seminary, and as many of her friends in town — and by "town" she meant Boston, which was only six miles away — as had returned from their summer jaunts. Then she would persuade her father to buy her a village wagon. She could drive very well, as he himself had said, and she could bring him from the station quite as well in a village wagon as in the shabby old phaeton which she was permitted to use, when Patrick was too busy to go with the dog-cart. Yes, a party and a dear little duck of a wagon like Marion Grant's, and then — and then — but at this point of her recollection her tears flowed afresh, for of

course all these pretty plans must go, with the coming of the new mother — no, the stepmother; she would never, never call her *mother!* Her mother! she looked up at the portrait that hung above the little clock, — the portrait of a fair sweet-faced woman with pleasant eyes that seemed to follow you about with a laugh in them. She died five years ago, when May was nine years old; but May could almost fancy she heard her mother saying, as those laughing eyes met her daughter's, —

"What 's the matter with the little daughter now?"

A sob caught in the daughter's throat here, and she cried aloud, "Oh, Mamma, Mamma, it 's no small thing that 's the matter now, but a very, very great thing! It 's somebody coming to take your place, — your place and mine, Mamma." But if May had a half fancy that the eyes would look different, would change their merry expression at this, she was mistaken. As the yellow afternoon sun sent a bright dancing ray across the canvas, the eyes seemed to dance with it in the happiest possible way, and tick, tack, tick, tack, the little clock sent its yellow pendulum back and forth in the sunshine. From

the portrait, May glanced at the clock-face. Why, why, why! the fifteen minutes had passed, and so absorbed had she been in her thoughts that she had not heard the locomotive whistle. How very odd! She ran out of the room, and out of the hall upon the piazza. The train must have arrived, and in five minutes more she would hear the carriage. From end to end she paced slowly up and down. How sweet the honeysuckle smelled, and the late lilies were all red and gold bloom. Leaning over the railing, she broke one from its stem and pinned it in her dress; as she did so, she could see the clock through the open window. Not only five, but ten minutes had gone. She stopped and listened. Was that the carriage? No. Five minutes more. The train could n't have arrived. What *was* the matter? Tick, tack, tick, tack, another five minutes went by, and Mrs. Marks came out on the piazza.

"My dear, I never knew this train to be late," she said anxiously. Then May's endurance gave way, and catching her hat from the hall-stand, she ran down the steps, calling back as she went, —

"I 'm going to the depot, Mrs. Marks, to see if anything has been heard. I can't wait here."

"That 's right, dearie; you 'll feel better to go, but I would n't worry, — there 's been some delay somewhere, that 's all."

"Some delay somewhere!" May thought of the delay that had occurred on the Boston and Providence road the year before, when the Roslindale bridge had given way, and hundreds of people had gone down with it. Her heart seemed to beat up into her throat, to stop her voice, and almost her breath. She could not frame the words to ask a question when she entered the depot, but she heard some one say, "There 's been an accident." She lost the next sentence, and caught only the last words, "— but the track is clear now, and the train has started."

Walking to the farther end of the platform, away from all the people, poor May sat down upon a baggage-truck to watch and wait. As she sat there she imagined the worst that could have happened. Perhaps her father was badly hurt, perhaps he was killed, and she would

never see him again; and at the very time when he had been suffering, perhaps dying, she had been having hard thoughts of him, had blamed him for what he had done and what he had not done, — for marrying again, and for not telling her of his plans until the last moment. She grew hot, then cold, as she thought of the words she had said to Cathy Bond, — of how she had joined her in calling him unkind, and even cruel. Oh, if only he came back alive, so that she could show him how she loved him! If only he came back, she would not do any of the disagreeable things she had declared to Cathy Bond that she would do. She would — yes, she would — even kiss her stepmother when she met her. She had said to Cathy only yesterday, "I shall not kiss her, and I shall be very stiff and cold to both of them." To *both* of them! Perhaps, perhaps —

In another moment May would have lost all control of herself and burst out crying, if the sound of a long shrill whistle had not roused her to the immediate present. As she heard it, she jumped to her feet and ran up the platform.

Yes, there was the train rounding the curve. In a minute she would know — what? She crowded her way through the throng of people to the front. Swiftly, then slackening in speed, the cars roll in and come to a full stop. There are faces at the windows, there are voices saying, "I am so glad to see you;" but not the face, not the voice she is longing for. She turns sick, cold, and dizzy, and staggers backward with an attempt to get away out of this eager throng that seems so happy. Then it is that somebody cries, —

"Why, here she is, now!"

She lifts her head, and there he is, — her handsome, young-looking father, sound and well, and smiling down upon her.

"Oh Papa, Papa! I thought you were killed — the train was so late, and they said — they said — "

"My dear child! There, there, don't — *don't cry.* It 's all right, you see. Here, Margaret, here 's this little girl has been frightened half out of her wits at the delay — thought I was killed."

May made a great effort to be calm, but the reaction

was so swift, it was hard work; and her pale face and tremulous lips were expressive of her nervousness as she looked up to meet her stepmother's glance. It was not a smiling glance like her father's, but May found it easier to meet for that reason. She knew her father always dreaded what he called "a scene," and had always discouraged any outbreaks either of tears or excited laughter; and with this knowledge she was perfectly well aware that her twitching lips and pallid face were annoying him at that moment. But this serious glance that met her, and the quiet remark, "I don't wonder that you were frightened at such a delay; *I* should have been very much frightened in your place," gave May a little time to recover herself; and then the quiet voice went on, asking no questions, but speaking of the causes of the delay, that did not, it seemed, involve much danger, being merely an accident of obstruction, by the breaking down of a freight-car, of which warning was duly given from station to station.

"Oh, I thought it was something dreadful," May broke forth at this. "I heard some one say something

about an accident, and I was too frightened to ask a question myself."

"And so worked yourself up into a fever with your imagination, as usual, my dear," her father responded, half laughing.

"She did the most natural thing in the world for a girl. I think I should have done the same thing," the quiet voice here said, with an easy tone of bright decision.

"Oh, you! I dare say. I've a pair of you, I see."

May looked at her father in surprise. He looked back at her with a funny little grimace.

"Yes, May, she 's just such another goose as you are in some things."

May caught the smile upon her stepmother's face. Her stepmother! In the excitement she had for the moment forgotten *the stepmother*. She regarded her now for the first time with observing eyes. What did she see?

A tall slender young woman, with brunette coloring, and an air of ease and elegance about her. May glanced

across at her father. How happy he seemed, and how young he appeared! But he must be a great deal older than this new wife, — this "Margaret." He had gray hairs, and there was no gray in that dark coil and fluff under the small stylish bonnet. May took in all these details and said to herself, "Why did she marry him, I wonder?" Then a mischievous little spirit whispered that her father was a rich man, and she remembered what Cathy Bond had said about girls marrying for money. Alas for May's good resolutions, as she sat waiting for the train a few minutes before! If her father only came back! And here he was, full of life and strength, and she had forgotten already. If he only came back, she would show him how she loved him, she would even — kiss her stepmother when she met her! But as the girl thought of this last duty which she had meant to perform, it suddenly came over her that she had really not been called upon to perform it, — that nobody, in fact, neither her father nor her stepmother, had seemed to expect it. Of course everything was to be accounted for by the excitement of the

occasion, but, nevertheless, a feeling of chagrin sent a flush to May's cheek at the recollection, and then a swift sharp question stung her, "Was this the way she was to be forgotten by them?"

The tears sprang to her eyes again at this thought, and she had hard work to repress them, but a glance at her father, and the sure knowledge that she had, of his dislike of unnecessary scenes, once more controlled her.

CHAPTER III.

"A GARDEN-PARTY? Why, yes, so I did promise you a garden-party some time. I remember; but it seems to me — it's rather late in the year, isn't it?"

"Oh, no; not if I set it for next week. Hillside is lovely in September."

"Yes, but next week is the fourth week in September, — pretty late in the month to count on the weather. Margaret," and Mr. Bartlett's voice rose a little louder in tone as he called to his wife, who was coming down one of the garden walks to the piazza where he and May were sitting.

"Yes," responded Margaret, looking up from the flowers she carried.

"Don't you think the fourth week in September is rather late for a garden-party?"

"Decidedly late. Why, I hope you are not thinking of giving a garden-party, are you?"

"I? Oh, no; it was May's idea. There, you see,— you 'll have to wait until next year, my dear," turning to May.

Margaret lifted her head quickly, and saw a rebellious expression on her stepdaughter's face. It was a still, cold expression, that she had seen several times before in the three days she had been at Hillside. Coming forward more rapidly, she said easily and pleasantly,—

"It is very nice of you to think of a garden-party for me; but it *is* rather late, you know."

Mr. Bartlett had taken up his newspaper, and paid no heed to these words. May sat silent, her chin dropped against her breast, all kinds of mutinous little thoughts in her mind, first and foremost of which was, "She thinks everything is to be for *her!*"

Mrs. Bartlett meanwhile stood regarding the down-bent face with a look of great perplexity, and with a slight flush on her cheek. The flush deepened, as May suddenly jumped from her chair, and catching up her

school satchel, started off down the walk with a "Good-by, Papa."

Her father glanced over his paper with a look of surprise. It was not May's habit to go away like this, without a good-by kiss. He was about to call her back, when he saw her join one of her school friends just outside the gate. In a few moments the matter slipped from his mind, in the absorbing interest of the political news he was reading.

It was Cathy Bond whom May had joined. Cathy was full of a lively interest in the new stepmother. She had found May rather reserved in what she had said within the last three days, and was greatly desirous of discovering the "reason why," of seeing for herself what sort of a person the stepmother was, and "how things were going;" but her little plan of calling for May was foiled by May's joining her outside the gate. In a moment, however, she saw, with those sharp eyes of hers, that something was very much amiss, and in a sympathetic tone asked, —

"What is it, Maisie; what is the matter?"

"Matter!" With a catch in her breath May repeated the brief conversation about the garden-party. The reserve of the last few days had vanished. Her good resolutions had blown to the winds. But it was only to Cathy that she spoke directly. Whether Cathy would have had the strength to have been silent if May had asked her, it is impossible to tell. But May did not ask her, — perhaps in her resentment she did n't [illegible], perhaps she did n't think; at any rate Cathy not keep silent, and by the afternoon recess all [illegible] girls knew the story of the garden-party as they had heard it from Cathy Bond.

Even Joanna Macy was stirred to indignation by this story.

"She *must* be conceited to think the party could only be for her. What had May to do with getting up a garden-party for her stepmother?"

Susy Morris, who heard the indignant tone of Joanna's voice, wanted to know what it meant.

"Oh, it means," cried Joanna, "that Cathy was n't far wrong about the stepmother;" and then Joanna

repeated the story as she had heard it from Cathy, that May had asked her father that morning if she might have the garden-party he had promised her, and that her stepmother had interfered and said that though she was much obliged to May for thinking of giving a garden-party for her, that it was decidedly too late for it, and that she hoped it would not be thought of any more! "The idea," concluded Joanna, "of her taking it for granted that the party must be for her, — that May, a girl of fourteen, would think of getting up any kind of a party for her! I never heard anything so conceited. Well?" as Susy's small face began to wrinkle up with a puzzled frown, "say it out, Susy, whatever it is!"

"My cousin —"

Joanna shouted with laughter.

"Oh, Susy, that cousin of yours!"

But Susy went on: "My cousin was n't but fifteen, and she asked her father to make a sailing-party for *her* stepmother. Perhaps May's stepmother thought that May was just asking for the party in the same

way, as a kind of welcome, you know. She might have misunderstood, or she might not have heard the whole, — don't you see?"

"No, I don't see. They were *all* on the piazza, talking; and May had distinctly asked her father if she might give to the school-girls the garden-party that he had promised that she might. Now, Miss Susy, what have you to say?"

"Nothing, only it does seem queer, if all this was said *right out before the stepmother*, that she should have thought the party was for her, and should have thanked May. When she did that, why did n't May tell her how it was; or why did n't Mr. Bartlett?"

"Oh, Susy, you will make a first-class lawyer if you live to grow up," was Joanna's laughing reply to this. But though Joanna laughed, Susy's words set her to thinking that perhaps there *was* a mistake somewhere, and suddenly she thought of something her mother had said to her once when she had repeated an unkind story to her: "My dear, a story twice told is two stories; and three times told, the truth is pretty well lost sight of."

But when Joanna tried to take this ground with the girls, she could get no hearing, for Cathy Bond was a power at the Hillside school, with her quick sympathies, and her quick glib way of expressing them. To May this quick glib way had always been attractive; it was still more so now, when she found it ranged so warmly on her side. Yet if she had heard Cathy's repetition of her account of the garden-party conversation, I think she would have been a little startled, but she did not hear it, and so matters went on from bad to worse; that is, the story grew and grew, and one girl and another took up what they called poor May's cause, and looked, if they did not speak, their pity, until May became such a centre of interest that she could not but be affected by it, could not but feel that she had reason to be very unhappy. Yet in spite of this feeling, there was n't so much outward indication of it as one might have expected.

Joanna remarked upon this one day to Cathy, declaring that, for her part, she thought that May seemed to look very cheerful under the circumstances.

"Cheerful!" exclaimed Cathy, tragically. "Why, she's just wretched, but she's keeping up; you know they are having no end of giddy goings-on up there."

"Up where?"

"Why, at the Bartletts'. Lots of people are calling; and it seems that Mrs. Bartlett has any quantity of friends and relatives in Boston, and they are driving out to see her and having five o'clock tea with her, and all that sort of thing."

"And May is in it all?"

"Why, to be sure. It's a trial to her, of course; and it's as much as she can do to keep up."

"A *trial* to her! Why is it a *trial* to her?" asked Joanna, imitating Cathy's grown-up words and ways.

Cathy flamed up. "You don't seem to have any feeling, Joanna. Don't you suppose she thinks of her own mother while these things are going on?"

This was too much for Joanna's keen common-sense, and she laughed outright.

"Things going on! Calling, and drinking tea! Oh, Cathy!"

"Well, but — but — it is n't just ordinary calling; it 's like — like parties," answered Cathy, flushing and stammering.

"And has n't Mr. Bartlett had whist-parties and dinner-parties many a time?"

"They were gentlemen's parties."

"Well, did n't May's Aunt Mary — her mother's own sister — have parties when she was staying there; and," triumphantly, "has n't May herself had a birthday-party every year since her mother died?"

"Yes; but that 's different. This is a stranger who comes to take her mother's place."

"She 's a stranger to May; but Mr. Bartlett has married this stranger just as he married May's mother."

"Yes, and I think it was horrid for him to do so."

"Oh, Cathy, lots of people marry again, — the nicest and best of people."

"Well, I think it is perfectly dreadful, when there are children, to give them a strange woman in the place of their mother. It is just as selfish as it can be."

"But, Cathy, there are good stepmothers as well

as bad ones. Why, stepmothers are just like other people."

"Yes, *before* they are stepmothers; but when they step into own mothers' places, they — they — "

As Cathy hesitated, Joanna laughingly broke in with, "They become wicked wolves, who are all ready to worry and devour their poor victims!" Cathy could not help joining a little in Joanna's laugh; but she said, almost in the next breath, —

"Oh, you can make fun, Joanna, as much as you like, but you 'll never make *me* believe in stepmothers!"

Just when Cathy was saying this, just when Joanna was wrinkling up her forehead and wanting to say impatiently, "Oh, you little pig of prejudice!" — around the corner where they stood talking, there suddenly appeared a big open carriage, full of gayly dressed people.

"There she is!" whispered Cathy, pointing with a nod of her head to a lady who was smilingly speaking to the gentleman sitting next to her.

Joanna craned her neck forward eagerly. This was her first glimpse of the stepmother.

"Why, she 's a beauty!" she cried out to Cathy; "and she looks like a girl! But where 's May, I wonder?"

"Oh, yes; where 's May? You see she is n't there. I suppose she was n't wanted; there was n't room for her," answered Cathy, spitefully.

But presently round the corner they heard again a light roll of wheels on the smooth road, and there appeared another carriage. It was a little yellow wagon, — a village wagon, — and in it were May Bartlett and a young girl about her own age. May was driving. She looked more than cheerful; she looked as if she was enjoying herself very much, and she was so occupied that she failed to see her two school friends as she drove by.

Joanna laughed.

"That 's what you call 'keeping up,' I suppose, Cathy," she said slyly.

Cathy did n't answer.

"And she has got the village wagon, after all. You were perfectly sure she would n't get it, you know."

"Well, May told me that when she asked her father for it, he said he did n't believe he could afford it now, and her stepmother flushed up and looked at him so queerly, as if she did n't like it; and so, of course, May thought that was the end of it. But I suppose when he came to think it over, he was ashamed not to get it for her."

Joanna wrinkled up her forehead again, but she kept her thoughts to herself.

CHAPTER IV.

CATHY BOND was spending the first vacation of the autumn with her "dear May," as she had been in the habit of calling May since the intimacy that had sprung up between them.

The girls who lived at a distance from Hillside generally remained at the seminary through the shorter vacations. Cathy Bond's home was two days' journey from the school. The Macy sisters and Susy Morris also lived at a distance, and the four hitherto had spent their vacations together at the seminary. Cathy's invitation had come about in this way: —

"I'm glad I don't have to spend my vacations at the seminary, as some of the girls do," May had happened to say one day to her father. Mrs. Bartlett, who was present, had looked up and remarked quickly, —

"It must be very forlorn for them." And when May had answered with emphasis, "It *is* forlorn," Mrs. Bartlett had surprised her by saying,—

"Why don't you invite one of them to spend the week with you?"

"But — but," May stammered, "Papa does n't like it."

"Papa does n't like what?" then inquired Mr. Bartlett, waking up from his absent-mindedness. May explained, and related how she had begged for this privilege of hospitality before, only to be told that it could n't be. Her father laughed at the recital, and then astonished her by this speech: —

"Oh, well, that was last year! I could n't have two giddy young things turned loose in the house then; I should have been totally neglected, if not trampled upon. Now, you see, I 've somebody to be company for me, while you neglect me."

"Oh, Papa! do you mean that now —"

"Yes; now, if you like," nodding and smiling at her.

"And I hope," said Mrs. Bartlett, smiling also, "that you will invite that pretty, bright-faced Cathy Bond."

Cathy Bond! The color in May's cheeks and her embarrassed look showed Mrs. Bartlett that something was amiss, and she immediately remarked, —

"Of course it makes no difference to me, my dear, which of your friends you invite; but I remembered this one particularly, and I thought her your favorite, from seeing her more with you than the others."

"Oh, yes; yes, she is," was May's rather confused reply.

And this is the way it came about that Cathy spent the vacation with her "dear May."

"After she has talked as she has, I should n't think she 'd feel much like going there to visit," Joanna exclaimed indignantly to her sister Elsie. And at last something of this kind was said to Cathy herself, who retorted that she was going to visit *May* at May's invitation, and not the stepmother. Perhaps it was this last sharp word that sharpened Cathy's temper, and sent her on her visit with her prejudices more alive than ever.

"That pretty, bright-faced girl," Mrs. Bartlett had said; and Cathy was all that, — pretty and bright-

faced; but when she sat at table that first night of her visit, Mrs. Bartlett felt a vague sense of disappointment in her. She had seen her only a moment or two at different times when she had called upon May, and then her prettiness and brightness had impressed Mrs. Bartlett very favorably. But as she sat at table, there was a sort of forward smartness, a too self-possessed, grown-up-ish air in what she said and did, to suit fastidious, well-bred people.

"Oh, dear," thought Mrs. Bartlett, "what a pity! — and such a nice-looking girl;" and then, "perhaps this is one reason why May has such a forbidding way with her."

While these thoughts were passing through Mrs. Bartlett's mind, Cathy with her sharpened temper was pluming herself upon her manners, and upon taking a stand against the stepmother. "I shall be polite," she had said to herself; "but I shall not be sweet and cordial, and I shall let them see that May has a real independent friend."

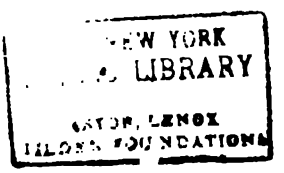
Mr. Bartlett, who at first had begun to try and make

"the little girl," as he called her, feel comfortable by saying pleasant, kind things to her, soon gave up his endeavor; and as he did so, he looked at her with one of his queer satirical expressions. May caught the look and grew hot, then cold. She knew perfectly what it meant, — that he was half displeased and half amused. What she did not know, was that he was thinking just then, "What in the world led Margaret to suggest that piece of trumpery as a visitor for May?" But as he ceased his endeavors to make "the little girl comfortable," another idea flashed into his mind. It would be a saving grace to let May see, as he could make her see, what a second-rate simpleton — for so he judged then — this friend was. The idea was too tempting not to be acted upon; and suddenly addressing her with a deference he might have shown to an older person, he drew the girl on to display — as she supposed — her knowledge and brilliancy. Instead, however, of these qualities, Cathy only displayed her foolishness and forwardness, behaving in fact in a very second-rate manner indeed. "Oh," thought poor May, "I would n't have



"He looked at her with one of his queer satirical expressions."—*Page 86.*




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believed that Cathy could go on like this! She can be so sensible. And Papa — Papa is too bad."

She looked appealingly at him, but he did not notice her. She then tried to stop Cathy by asking her a question about school matters. But Cathy would not be stopped. Still she rattled on, perking up her little chin, and laughing, until May began to feel very much ashamed, and to wish that something would happen, or somebody would come to the rescue. And somebody did come to the rescue; and this somebody was — the stepmother.

Mrs. Bartlett had been observant of everything, — of her husband's "mischief," as she termed it, of Cathy's silliness, and of May's annoyance.

"What possesses Edward," she thought, "to draw out that child's absurdities like this?" And then she echoed May's thought, "It is too bad of him." But like May, she did n't understand his motive. Yet if she had understood, I think she would have done the same thing. And this is what she did. As she saw her husband, with that look of mischief on his face, about

to address Miss Cathy again, she turned to him with a sudden question relating to an important matter in which he was interested. His attention once caught, she held it, though there was an amused sparkle in his eyes that showed he was perfectly well aware of his wife's purpose. But the purpose was served, and May drew a sigh of relief.

But Cathy was not so well pleased to be thus robbed of what she considered such flattering attention, and responded rather absently to May's low-voiced attempts to talk with her; and after they had left the table, when May tried to draw her into her own special sanctum, — a charming room full of books and pictures and games, — Cathy said decidedly, —

"Oh, let 's go into the parlor; I think it 's so pleasant where there 's an open fire."

But if she fancied she was again to receive the attention that had so flattered her, she was mistaken. Mr. Bartlett became absorbingly interested in a book, from which he now and then read passages to his wife. He took not the slightest notice of "the children," as he

would have called them. Disappointed by this neglect, Cathy looked about her for some amusement; and as she saw the open piano in the farther corner of the large room, she whispered to May that they might try one of their duets.

"Oh, no, no! not now; we'll try to-morrow," poor May whispered back. But Cathy could not or would not understand, and saying carelessly, "Well, let me look at the music," led the way to the instrument. Once there, she did not content herself with looking; she must just try whether she could remember this or that she had taken for a lesson. "This or that" turned out to be a few bars of various compositions, not of the highest order, and played without particular skill. May stole a glance down the room at her father. Mr. Bartlett was fond of music, and had some knowledge of it, and a cultivated taste. May saw him twist his mouth into a comical smile, and shake his head ruefully as he looked at Cathy.

"Come, let us play 'Halma;' I have a new board," she whispered to Cathy.

But Cathy just then struck into a gay waltz, and banged away with all her might. As she played the last bars, Mrs. Bartlett approached.

"That was one of the Strauss waltzes, was n't it?" she asked Cathy politely; and then she began to speak of the great Peace Jubilee in Boston, when Johann Strauss had come all the way from Austria to play, and to lead the great orchestra in the colosseum that was erected for the jubilee.

"I was about your age then," she said, looking at Cathy, "and I never had had such a perfectly lovely time as I had then." As she went on describing that fairy-like structure, with its glass roof, covering so many acres, and the bands from England and Germany and France and Austria and Ireland, that came over to America to play their own music in celebration of the peace of the world, May leaned forward, spell-bound by the description and all it brought before her; and even Cathy forgot herself for the time. After this, Mr. Bartlett called out, —

"Margaret, play something for us;" and Margaret

played some beautiful selections from Schumann and Beethoven, and then, at the last, she sang a good-night song by Robert Franz; and with the concluding words, "Good-night, good-night," she rose, smiling, from her seat, and as at that instant the little clock on the mantel struck half-past nine, May knew that it was time to go to bed, and rose also, expecting Cathy to follow her example; but Cathy hung back, and began to speak.

"Do you know any waltzes that you could play for us to dance, Mrs. Bartlett?" she asked. Before Mrs. Bartlett could reply, Mr. Bartlett had come forward, and was saying, "Good-night, children;" and in the next moment he was asking his wife to play a Hungarian march for him.

May was only too glad to get away. Once upstairs by themselves, Cathy would be herself again, she reasoned. But there were several things rankling in Cathy's mind, not the least of which was that "Good-night, *children;*" and when May, with a little skip of relief, entered the chamber, and said cheerfully, —

"I don't feel a bit sleepy; do you, Cathy?" Cathy answered sharply, —

"I? No; I could have waltzed for half an hour."

The color flew to May's face. "But, Cathy, it is half-past nine, half an hour later than I usually go to bed, and you told me that nine was the seminary hour."

"Well, this is n't the seminary. I did n't expect to visit a school," sarcastically.

May had to remember that Cathy was her guest, and that she must be polite to her, so she said, —

"I 'm so sorry, Cathy. But — she — will play for us to dance to-morrow, I dare say."

"'She' — oh, that 's what you call her? I 've wondered what it was! What do you call her when you speak to her?"

"I — I — don't say anything. I wait until she is looking at me. I — "

Cathy went off into a giggle.

"Oh, it 's too funny. I must tell the girls when I get back that you only speak of her as 'she,' and wait until she looks at you before — "

"Oh, don't, Cathy!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't make fun — like that — to the girls."

"Well, I *should* just like to know what has come over you, May Bartlett; but I know well enough. *She* has got the upper hand of you in your own home, that 's clear."

The color in May's face deepened.

"How can you talk so foolishly, Cathy?"

"I'm not talking foolishly. I saw it at the very first, when we were at the tea-table. What did she do when your father was so nice and pleasant to me but stop him and make him talk to her! And then she would n't let him come near us in the parlor, but came herself after a while, and told us stories about that old jubilee. I 've heard my mother tell about it a hundred times."

"Oh, Cathy! you don't know — "

May stopped. She could n't tell Cathy that she had been saved twice: once from making herself ridiculous, and again from being an annoyance, by — yes — by the stepmother. And it was the stepmother who had

encouraged her visit, who had spoken of her as pretty and bright-faced, when Cathy had been so bitter against her, and, worst of all, at the very time when she had been really doing her a kindness — but what was it Cathy was saying?

"I *do* know one thing, May, that you are another girl here at home from what you are at school. You don't seem to remember what you've told me about the garden-party, and the wagon, and everything. You to tell *me* not to talk to the girls!"

May began to feel very angry, and luckily very small too; the latter feeling prevented the outburst of the former. How could she admonish Cathy? There was a silence for a few minutes, while Cathy, with an injured look, made her preparations for bed. By and by May said, with an effort, —

"She wanted you to come."

"*She* wanted me;" a little rasping laugh, and then, "What do you mean by that?"

May explained by relating the conversation where Mrs. Bartlett had spoken of her so pleasantly. The

angry lines relaxed a little in Cathy's face, and presently she said easily, —

"Well, it was never *my* affair, you know. *I* never knew anything about her, except what you told me, and I'm sure I hope she will turn out nice for your sake."

May struggled with her temper. She felt put in the wrong on every side. But even if she yielded to the wild impulse within her, what could she say? If Cathy had encouraged *her* to talk against her stepmother, she had likewise encouraged Cathy!

There was nothing to be said then, and nothing to be done, except to listen to Cathy with what patience she might; but Cathy herself presently turned from the subject to something else, and a little later, all unkind thoughts were lost for the time in slumber.

CHAPTER V.

"PLAY for you to dance? Certainly I will. But, May, how would you like to invite the other girls who are spending their vacation at the seminary to join a little party here on Saturday evening?"

"But there are not enough to make a party."

Mrs. Bartlett smiled.

"But I said 'join a party.' I thought I would invite some of my friends in Boston with their young people, if you would like it, and then we might have enough for a dancing-party. *Would* you like it?"

May looked up. There was something in the wistful tone of this "*Would* you like it?" that made her ashamed of her ungracious hesitation; yet Cathy's sneering accusation of the night before, "You are another girl here at home from what you are at school," had been rankling in her mind. She must prove herself;

she must show Cathy that she was the same, and so instead of responding at once as she felt, with delight at the project, she said after that hesitation, in a cold tone, —

"Yes, I should like it very well." And then Cathy, who was standing by, sprang forward and exclaimed:

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlett, I think it would be just lovely, and I'm sure *I* shall like it above all things!"

Again May felt herself put in the wrong and misunderstood, and again she had to struggle with her temper. This conversation had taken place on the morning after Cathy's arrival, which had been upon Friday, the beginning of the vacation. The party proposed was for the next Saturday.

"The only thing that troubles me is that I have n't a light dress to wear, — I 've only my garnet cashmere here at Hillside," Cathy remarked, when she and May were alone together.

"Oh, but we are so nearly of a size you can wear one of mine; I have two white wool dresses," May answered readily.

When the dresses were produced and tried on, Cathy found that the latest-made dress suited her best.

"But, Cathy, don't you think it is too long? It comes almost to the floor upon *you.* I am taller, you know."

"Oh, no, 't is n't a bit too long. I like it," Cathy replied hastily. And so the matter was dismissed, Cathy, after removing the dress, hanging it up in the closet with a pleased air. The week sped by very quickly, and for the most part smoothly. Cathy evidently enjoyed herself, though she found that Mr. Bartlett was no longer disposed to treat her as a grown-up young lady; indeed, that he took but scant notice of her. The long drives, however, in the little village wagon in the bright early days of winter that were like autumn, the trips to Boston, to a matinée performance of "Little Lord Fauntleroy," and to visit one or two picture galleries, filled the short days to overflowing. On several occasions during this time, Cathy had said things that had made May exceedingly uncomfortable. Once, at the beginning of the preparations for the little party,

she suddenly asked, "Don't you help, when anything of this kind is going on?"

"Help! how?" May inquired in a bewildered tone.

"Why, with the notes of invitation for one thing. I always do that part at home."

"No, I never thought of it. When Aunt Mary lived with us I was too young, and she left us only two years ago."

"Well, you do have an easy time, May, I must say," Cathy had responded to this. May did not care to ask Cathy for any more of her opinions on the subject; a sense of hurt pride was beginning to affect her, — to make her draw back within herself, and to feel that Cathy was going too far. Once she would have told Cathy this, would have told anybody who had spoken to her in such a fashion; but now the consciousness that she herself had opened the way for Cathy to be so free with her, silenced her.

Yet in spite of some annoyances like this, the week ran rapidly toward its end, and Saturday morning came. Just after luncheon Mrs. Bartlett said to the girls, —

"Had n't you two girls better try on your dresses now, and see if everything is all right? They may need new ruching in the neck, or some little changes. I always try on a dress after it has n't been worn for a while, before the last minute, as we used to say at home."

May started up readily; Cathy was not so ready.

"But I've tried the one I'm to wear, Mrs. Bartlett," she said.

"Yes, I know, — all by yourselves; but don't you want to let me see if everything is right? If it is n't, I can let Julie attend to it at once."

May was already upstairs, and Cathy slowly followed her.

As Mrs. Bartlett entered the chamber she saw her stepdaughter standing arrayed in a very pretty white gown, much too short in the skirt.

"There, now, my dear, here is something to be done. You have grown so tall, your skirt must be lengthened." She busied herself for several moments in taking measurements, and then turned to Cathy.

"Why, my dear, you both have made a mistake. This is as much too long for you as the one May has on is too short for her;" and she went forward, smilingly, ready to help remedy this "mistake." But Cathy stepped back.

"No, there is no mistake, Mrs. Bartlett. I — my party-dress at home is as long as this. I like it."

"But — with your hair down in a braid, it hardly seems to suit you. The skirt is as long as mine, I think," Mrs. Bartlett remarked quietly.

"Oh, well, I shall put my hair up to-night. I often do at home," quickly responded Cathy. "Besides, the other dress would be short for me too. I'm nearly as tall as May."

As she spoke, Cathy walked across the room to the mirror, and as she did so the difference in height allowed May to look easily over her head. Mrs. Bartlett caught May's eye at that moment, and laughed! This was very undignified, no doubt, but Mrs. Bartlett was only an older girl herself, and the whole situation had suddenly become irresistibly ludicrous to her. May, too,

in that moment, felt her indignation at Cathy change to merriment; and as Cathy wheeled about with a look



Cathy adorns herself for the party.

of questioning, she surprised an exchange of glances that both mortified and offended her.

But with the easy readiness of her greater experience, Mrs. Bartlett instantly said, —

"It was so funny, my dear, to see May in that

ridiculously short skirt overtopping you that I had to laugh;" and then turning briskly to May, she treated the matter as of no consequence by saying, —

"Now, May, if you will come with me to the sewing-room, Julie will attend to your skirt."

The two girls saw little of each other after this, until it was time to dress for the evening. It was an early party, on account of the young people, and May had been occupied with Julie most of the afternoon.

When, therefore, the two met later in the day, something of Cathy's irritation had been overlaid by other things; but it had only been overlaid, and May knew by the rather artificial manner in which Cathy tried to be cordial and natural, that she had not forgotten. Specially was this noticeable when May donned the gown that Julie had altered.

"Oh, doesn't it look nice, though?" cried Cathy, in a slightly strained and nervous tone.

"It does very well," was all that May could reply; for in fact the gown did not look particularly nice, spite of Julie's efforts. The lengthening process showed

in the white surface, and even the broad sash did not conceal that the waist also had been a little outgrown. Julie, who had been sent in by Mrs. Bartlett to assist the girls at their toilets, turned to Cathy at last, saying in her French-English, —

"Now if Mees Cathy's ready for me, I make her ready."

Cathy still waited. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, she cried, —

"Oh, May, will you see if I can have some of that red kalmia from the greenhouse instead of the daisies?"

May took the hint, — Cathy wanted to get rid of her. It was on the stroke of the hour for which the guests had been bidden when they next met.

"What can your friend be about?" Mrs. Bartlett asked with some concern as the minutes sped by. May knew no more than her stepmother. She only knew that the bunch of kalmia had been sent up to Cathy half an hour ago.

"Perhaps you had better run up and see if she is waiting for you to come for her," Mrs. Bartlett then

suggested. But just as May started, the clock struck eight, and at the same time the door-bell rang. At that very moment a white vision appeared on the parlor threshold. It was a slender young lady in a white dress, with her dark hair piled in a crown-like coil upon the top of her head. At the neck, a cluster of scarlet flowers began, and widening out in a bright mass of color, drooped in long sprays to the waist-line. Both May and her stepmother looked at this vision at first with surprise. Was it a guest whose arrival they had not heard? The white vision stepped forward; the red mouth above the red flowers smiled.

"Why, Cathy!" cried May. Yes, it was Cathy. In her long white dress, with her dusky hair gathered up, and all those scarlet kalmias, she looked like a young lady, and a very pretty one, it must be confessed. Cathy was quite aware of the effect that she produced. She saw surprised admiration in May's glance. It was not so easy to read Mrs. Bartlett's face, but in the smile of recognition Miss Cathy saw no sign of disapproval.

The ring at the door-bell was that of the little party from the seminary. When they came into the parlor, Joanna, as the eldest of the three, advanced first, Elsie and Susy shyly following. All three were dressed somewhat alike, in different shades of dark-blue cashmere. If, as they observed the white-robed figures before them, they might have felt a little shade of girlish regret and mortification that they too were not so whitely clothed, the warm reception that they received from Mrs. Bartlett and May went far to reassure them. None of the party at first recognized Cathy. When they did, Susy forgot her shyness for the moment in her astonishment, and cried out in that little soft odd voice of hers, —

"Oh, it's Cathy in a fancy costume, — how funny!"

The rest of the girls laughed, — that is, all but Cathy; and Susy, noting the vexed expression of her face, added, —

"I did n't mean by 'funny' that it was n't nice too."

The girls laughed again, Cathy joining this time. As for Mrs. Bartlett, she thought, —

"What a dear, quaint little darling it is! If only *she* had been May's visitor!"

But as the other guests began to arrive, there was little opportunity to indulge in regrets of any kind. The guests were some of them strangers to May even: they were old friends and acquaintances of Mrs. Bartlett with their young sisters, or daughters, and their brothers.

"Oh, is n't it nice to have real partners!" exclaimed Cathy, as she saw the latter enter.

Joanna, to whom she spoke, laughed, and said she thought *she* was real enough whenever she had been Cathy's partner.

"Oh, but you know what I mean, — *gentlemen* partners," pettishly responded Cathy; and Joanna had responded to this, —

"*I* call them boys."

Two violins, a harp, and a cornet, in a small room leading out of the parlors, made music for the dancers. All the girls entered into the dancing with great zest, Cathy more than the rest. When May had first recognized her, in the long dress and piled-up hair, she had

felt such a thrill of admiration that all her old belief and regard, which had been sorely shaken within the last few days, revived. In fact, Cathy looked so much like a splendid grown-up young lady then, that to criticise her seemed an impertinence; and introducing this splendid young lady to one and another, May had a feeling of pride in her; and when she saw with what a self-possessed air these introductions were received, she was sure that there was not one of those Boston girls who had nicer manners.

The dancing was in the long wide hall, as well as in the parlors. Cathy seemed to prefer the hall, and May found herself in the parlor, separated from her as the evening went on; and now and then she would wonder whether Cathy was having a good time. May herself was having a delightful time. She had forgotten all about her dress being short in the waist, and showing where it had been let down; she had forgotten everything that was disagreeable, indeed, when she suddenly became conscious that the music was greatly accelerated in speed, and that over and above

the music there seemed to be a good deal of noise, — the sound of voices and laughter.

She was vaguely wondering what it meant, when she heard one of the boy strangers from town say to another, with a laugh, —

"They're rushing things out there in the hall, aren't they?" And the other answered, —

"It's that seminary girl. She's set them all a-going. I saw her speak to the musicians just now."

That seminary girl! Who, *who* could they mean? Just then the final quadrille change was called, and the moment she was free, May dashed out into the hall. But the music, which had ceased for a second, had struck up again into a wild jig tune; and there was Cathy, her hair flying, her laugh sounding, leading off down the polished floor, almost on a run, to the jig tune, with one of the older boys for her partner.

"Margaret, if you don't stop that little hoyden, I will!" May here overheard her father say. The next instant she saw her stepmother walk rapidly past, and in another instant the music came to an abrupt close.

Cathy, in her mad speed, at that instant met Mrs. Bartlett face to face as she was leaving the music-room.

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlett," she broke forth, "how *could* you stop our fun?"

"Hush, my dear," began Mrs. Bartlett; but Cathy, wild with her fun, as she called it, interrupted with a pleading and protesting, — pleading for "just one more swing," and protesting generally in a foolish, flippant little manner, full of vanity and silliness, with a notion that she was behaving in a very young-ladyish style, and attracting the admiration of everybody about her, when she was attracting, instead, that very unenviable attention which expresses itself in astonished stares and questions of: "Who is that little hoyden?" If she had turned, as she stood there protesting, she would have seen the master of the house approaching with an ominous frown upon his face; but she did not turn, and she only saw the mistress of the house shake her head at some one, and then heard her say, —

"Come, Cathy, it is nearly supper-time, and I want you to go upstairs and let Julie put your hair and dress

in order." As Mrs. Bartlett said this, she fixed her eyes upon Cathy with a perfectly kind but a compelling gaze, and the girl knew that she must obey; but there was in her heart a blind, unreasoning fury as she did so.

May, full of shame and disappointment, shrank back into the shadow of the portière near her father, but unseen by him. It was then she heard her stepmother say, —

"No, Edward, I could n't let you speak to her. You must remember she is only a child, — a wilful, spoiled child, — and her head is a little turned by her high spirits, and her prettiness, and the effect she seemed to produce."

"Margaret, you would find excuses for anybody."

"I would certainly find excuses for such a mere child as this."

They moved away together, but May still remained behind the portière, thinking, thinking, thinking. This was the third time her stepmother had shielded Cathy, — Cathy, who from the start had been against her, had said hard things, had had hard thoughts of her, had

done her best to injure her. But who had encouraged Cathy? Again this question confronted May.

"May, is it you, my dear?"

Somebody was pushing the portière aside. It was her stepmother.

"Oh, it *is* you. Will you run up, my dear, and see if Cathy is ready to come down. I can't think what keeps her so long. It could n't have taken Julie more than five minutes to put her dress in order."

As May sped on her errand her thoughts sped with her, tormenting her with fears and regrets. At the door of her room she paused a moment, with the fears increasing, for there was a confusion of voices, Cathy's rising above the others.

"No; I shall *not* go down again! — to be sent away like a baby — do you think — "

"Oh, Cathy! Cathy! you *must* come down; I've been sent for you," cried May, as she entered the room.

"I shall *not!*"

"How silly you are, Cathy! Of course you'll go down."

It was Joanna who spoke. As May crossed the threshold she saw that Joanna and Susy were both standing by the dressing-table.

"There's no 'of course' about it," Cathy retorted sharply, "and you may call me silly if you like, Joanna Macy, but I should just like to ask you how you would feel to be treated like a baby, — sent off to have your hair brushed and your face washed, right in the middle of a dance!"

"Hair brushed and face washed! How you do go on, Cathy! But it was n't in the middle of a dance. The cotillon had ended, and it was you who started that other thing; I saw you, and I should have thought Mrs. Bartlett would have been disgusted. It was horrid of you, a school-girl like you, to be so forward. I was so ashamed I did n't know what to do."

"A school-girl like me! I'm fifteen, Joanna Macy."

"What's fifteen? We are all nothing but a pack of school-girls, any way."

"And to be stopped like that, and sent off, and

your partner — a young gentleman — standing with you!"

"Oh, that's it! A young gentleman! That Everett boy!" and Joanna laughed scornfully.

Cathy's rage did n't cool at Joanna's speech, and she was about to retort again, when May broke in with her entreaty, —

"Oh, *do* come, Cathy! I have been sent for you."

"Yes, *she* sent you, I suppose," with a sneering emphasis upon the pronoun.

"Cathy, you are very, very unjust. If you did but know it, she has been very kind to you," cried May.

"She! She! She!" Cathy mockingly repeated. "That is what May calls this stepmother of whom all at once she is so fond!" and then, in a few sharp, stinging words, Cathy let loose the irritation that had been accumulating from her hurt vanity for the last few days. In these words were reproach and accusation, which had enough truth in them to make it very difficult for May to control herself; but with the reproach and accusation against herself were mixed at

last such comment and criticism of her stepmother as not only May, but the two other girls, felt to be both unfair and impertinent.

"How can you, Cathy?" burst out Joanna, indignantly. "Mrs. Bartlett has been lovely to you, — to us all, I'm sure. If you had to sputter out that silly prejudice against stepmothers at first, you might stop now. I should think you'd harmed May about enough."

"*I* harmed May! May hated her stepmother from the first. It was May who told me — " Her voice suddenly ceased as she caught the expression of horror in May's eyes, — May, who was looking beyond her at somebody or something, — who — what could it be?

CHAPTER VI.

CATHY turned, and there, between the portières that separated them from the next room, stood — Mrs. Bartlett! How much had she heard? She had heard enough. Her cheeks were scarlet; her eyes were bright with unshed tears. Silent from horror in the first moment, in the next, as she saw that look of hurt, May's heart rose up in one pitiful, pitying, appealing cry, and that cry was, —

"Oh, Mamma! Mamma!"

Mrs. Bartlett lifted her head with a quick start; she began to speak: "May, I —" then her voice broke, and the tears that had been withheld overflowed.

Just here, "Margaret, Margaret, where are you all?" Mr. Bartlett was heard calling impatiently as he approached from the other room.

Margaret dried her eyes with a swift movement, and with an entreating, "Come, girls, come with me," turned away.

Thoroughly subdued and not a little frightened, Cathy made no further attempt at delay, but followed the others as they obeyed Mrs. Bartlett's entreaty.

Going down the stairs, Susy, pressing close to Joanna, whispered softly, —

"Joanna, did you notice May called her stepmother 'Mamma,' and did you notice her stepmother's face? She cried, but there was a little smile there; did you notice, Joanna?"

Joanna squeezed Susy's hand for reply. She had noticed, but she fancied no one else had noticed.

How the party ended, May could scarcely have told you. Everything was like a bad dream after this, and she moved about mechanically in the supper-room, answering questions, now and then seeing that some one was served, but taking nothing herself; once or twice she saw her stepmother looking at her, but she could not meet the glance. Cathy took things more easily.

Back again among the lights, the flowers, and the young people, her spirits returned in a measure, though with a wholesome difference of restraint. May observed her ease with astonishment. *She* could think of nothing but that dreadful talk upstairs, especially of that last sentence which her stepmother had overheard. And how much more had been overheard?

All the instincts of a lady were beginning to work in May's mind, and to fill her with self-disgust and shame. She felt like a little traitor in her own household, — a traitor to her father, and an ungenerous enemy to her father's wife; an ungenerous enemy from the first, when she had wilfully misunderstood, and — yes, wilfully misrepresented the matter of the garden-party. Then one by one her other "grievances" came up, "grievances" that she had made much of and confided to Cathy! Oh, those confidences to Cathy! They reminded her of the old mythological story of the dragon's teeth that Cadmus blindly sowed. They had come up like armed men to destroy her.

It had been part of the arrangement, when Cathy

had been permitted to spend her vacation at the Bartletts', that she should return on Saturday afternoon to the seminary, that she might be all ready for school duties upon Monday. The party had been the excuse for extending the hour of return to evening. Both Cathy and May, at the beginning of the week, had urged, but without effect, that the visit might extend to Monday morning. Now both felt a sense of relief that they were to separate that night. Cathy, as usual, was the easier of the two, as the final good-byes were said. Her glib tongue did not falter even when she faced Mrs. Bartlett, though, to her credit be it said, a deep blush suffused her cheeks as that lady came forward with a kindly courtesy the girl knew she did not deserve to receive. As for May, the hardest time of all was when the last carriage drove away and she was left alone with her father and his wife. Her father would be sure to say something about Cathy's behavior, though, thanks to her stepmother, she knew he had heard nothing of what had occurred upstairs. Perhaps, however, she could escape. It was a late hour for her, and she would say good-

night in the hall and run up to bed. She was half-way up the stairway when Mr. Bartlett called out quickly, —

"May!"

She stopped suddenly, her heart beating violently, her limbs trembling. The next moment she started backward, stumbled, and — fell.

"My *dear!*" and her father sprang forward, and lifted her in his arms. She lay there quite still and very pale. "Are you hurt?" She shook her head, smiled a little, and tried to help herself. As she did so she cried out with pain, —

"Oh, my foot?" She had sprained her ankle.

"Send for Mrs. Marks, Margaret," Mr. Bartlett said, as he carried May into her chamber.

"Mrs. Marks went to bed an hour ago, Edward, with a sick headache; but if it is a sprain, I know all about a sprain, and if you will trust me" — Margaret paused an instant — "you and May," and she looked down upon May with questioning eyes.

"Of course we 'll trust you; we 're only too glad to, are n't we, Maisie?"

May gave a shy assent in a faint "yes," yet there was an expression in her face that did not escape Mrs. Bartlett's eyes. It was an expression of dread mixed with shame. But ignoring all this, she set about her work of relief in a pleasant, easy manner, sending Julie for hot water and bandages, then softly manipulating the sprained ankle, with a touch both sure and skilful. There was something in this touch, delicate and firm, that brought up to May, by sheer force of contrast, Mrs. Marks's heavy-handed care. The light movement, too, the soft-voiced orders, the ease of everything, — all were so different from Mrs. Marks's bustling ways, her step that shook the room, her incessant talk of pity and question and anxiety, whenever an accident put any one under her ministrations.

By degrees May lost something of that conscious feeling of dread and shame as she lay there. Even when Julie left the room for the night, and May found herself quite alone with her stepmother, the dread did not return, and the keen feeling of shame was softened by a sense of sorrow and humility for all that she had

thought and said. It was just when this feeling was strong within her that her stepmother, turning down the light, approached the bed with the words, —

"There, my dear, I have put this stand beside you, with a bell upon it, and if you need me, you have only to ring, and I shall hear you and come to you. You say your ankle does not pain you very much now?"

"Not nearly as much, — just a little."

"Well, I shall be in the next room to you, and can come to you in a moment if you need anything."

"In the next room?" May inquired with surprise.

"Yes, I shall sleep on the lounge there to-night to be near you."

May looked up quickly, and gave a little exclamatory "Oh!"

"What is it, my dear?" asked Mrs. Bartlett, bending over her.

"Nothing," very faintly.

It was then, with a final adjustment of the bed-clothing, that her stepmother, turning to go, said gently, —

"Good-night, my dear;" and May, closing her eyes, answered almost in a whisper, —

"Good-night — Mamma."

In the next instant she felt the touch of soft, warm lips upon her forehead. She could not speak. She lay quite still. When she opened her eyes, she was alone.

On Monday morning word was sent to the seminary that Miss Bartlett had sprained her ankle and would not be able to attend school for a fortnight at least.

Of course Cathy would be the first to go and see May, thought the girls. But Cathy seemed to be in no haste to go. She even excused herself by saying that she was not well, when Professor Ingalls proposed that she should take a message for him to Mrs. Bartlett. And so it came about that Joanna and Susy were May's first callers. It was Mrs. Bartlett who received the visitors, and who went up to announce them to May. It happened that she did not mention their names as she went into the chamber, that she only said, —

"Well, my dear, two of your school friends have come to cheer you up."

"Oh, I can't — I can't see Cathy — just now," May cried excitedly.

"But it is n't Cathy; it is Joanna, and that quaint little girl — I forget her name," Mrs. Bartlett answered quietly.

"Oh, Susy!" And when Joanna and Susy went into the room the happy relief in May's heart shone in her face, and gave her greeting an added warmth.

By and by the girls fell to talking of the party, of the "good time" they had had, and by and by in this talk, that last half-hour — that bad time that had so spoiled the "good" — was brought up, and Joanna exclaimed vehemently, —

"I think that Cathy Bond would spoil anything. She 's what Professor Ingalls would call 'demoralizing.' She — she tried from the first to — to — "

Joanna colored a little and stopped.

May took up her words — "to set me against my stepmother. I know what you were going to say, but — Joanna — I — I let Cathy talk — I made her talk by telling her things. My Cousin Jack said last summer

that boys, if they *were* rougher than girls, would be ashamed to do some of the sneaking things that girls do sometimes, — the things that were unfair and like little lies. I was awfully vexed when he said it, but now I think he was just right."

"Oh, no, May," interrupted Joanna, soothingly.

"Yes, I do; I know he was right." Then, with a catch in her breath, May went on and confessed herself, — told of her unfair way of looking at things and of representing them; of the garden-party, the village wagon, and other "little lies" as she now called them.

"But you believed you were right then," still soothingly consoled Joanna.

"I read the other day in a book that people — some people — lie to themselves and believe it!" Susy suddenly broke forth in her queerest way.

"Oh, Susy!" cried Joanna, looking at May; but May's lips were drawing up from their sad lines, and as she caught Joanna's eye she laughed, Joanna following in a half-suppressed giggle.

"But what I can't get over," began May again, "is that — that last thing that Cathy said upstairs here, that — Mamma overheard." As May said this, as she pronounced the word "Mamma," she colored scarlet.

"You called her 'Mamma' right there that night, and, May, she knew how sorry you were then, for I saw her smile quick and soft, and I told Joanna about it, did n't I, Joanna?"

"Oh, but, Susy, that was the least I could do. I *had* to say it. It burst out."

"Why don't you say some more — let some more — what you have told us — 'burst out' to *her?*" quaintly asked Susy.

"Oh, I don't know how. I feel so mean when I think of things."

"You would n't feel so mean afterward, and, May, you do like her now, don't you; that is, you *don't hate* her now, the least bit, do you?"

Susy did say such things! Joanna turned cold as she listened. But May answered as if she was relieved to speak, —

"I don't think I ever hated *her;* it was the stepmother."

There was a little pause; then Joanna said, —

"I think she was lovely, — just lovely to Cathy at the party. I was dancing in the hall, and I saw and heard everything."

May thought how in the same way she had been lovely to Cathy through the whole week.

As she thought this, Susy started up from one of her small reveries and said brightly, —

"Oh, I've been thinking how I wish she would like *me.* I think it would be perfectly beautiful; she's so sweet and sort of far off and up above us, like an elder sister."

Joanna laughed merrily at Susy's sudden outburst, but to May the words came more seriously. She was startled and thrilled by them.

"Sweet and sort of far off and up above us." It wasn't a question of one's liking *her,* with Susy. It was who and what *she* would like. All at once May knew that it was this that was of consequence to her

now, — this regard of her stepmother. She looked back and saw her from the first, with that air of fine courtesy that had never wavered; then, through the last week, not only courteous but generously kind. Of course she would still go on just the same, — that was her way, — having kindness and consideration for people who did not deserve it; but to have her liking, her loving, — that was quite another thing.

May was silent so long that Joanna felt that she was tired, and that it was time for the visit to end.

Going down the stairs, the two girls were met by Mrs. Bartlett.

"What, going so soon?" she said. "Can't you stay longer?" But when Joanna explained why they went, she did not urge them to remain.

Left to herself, May's thoughts returned to the miserable events of the past weeks, the mistakes of the past month. If she could talk with her stepmother as she had talked to the girls, — as Susy had recommended! But how could she? "Far off and up above us ——" Susy's words haunted her. No, she could never talk so

her as she had talked to the girls. Her stepmother had been kind to her; she had kissed her; but that was because she meant to do her duty. Over and over poor May pondered these perplexities. Tired and spent at last, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. So absorbed was she by her miseries that she did not hear the door open, nor the fall of a light foot-step. She heard nothing until a voice close to her — her stepmother's voice — said gently, —

"My dear, what is it? Are you so tired?"

She shook her head; she was past speaking just then. Standing beside her, Mrs. Bartlett stroked the tumbled hair with soft quiet touches, and spoke not a word. By and by, under these soothing strokes, the sobs grew less, and presently ceased altogether. Then smilingly, but with an apologetic tone, Mrs. Bartlett said, —

"I'm afraid I have n't taken very good care of you, my dear, to let you get so tired."

"It was n't that I was tired, I — I — got to thinking after Joanna and Susy went away."

"And I thought Joanna and Susy would cheer you."

"Mamma!" The color rushed into May's cheeks as she said this.

"Yes, my dear."

"I — I want to tell you something. It was n't true what Cathy said — that night. I did n't — I never hated — *you.*"

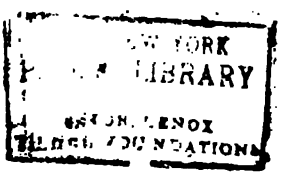
"I never thought you did. I think I understand. It was — *the stepmother*, and I see now how you were encouraged by that hot-headed, foolish Cathy. My dear, I —"

"No — no. I — I encouraged Cathy to begin with. You must n't think it was all Cathy's fault." Then, with a swift rush of words, gathering up her courage with the desperate determination that had come to her, May poured forth her confessions. All her little prejudices, her wilful injustices, were told unsparingly, and at the end, with a little shivering sigh that was half a gasp, she burst out, —

"But I never said what Cathy — thought I did, — never, never!"

"My dear!"




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"Now we can understand each other." — *Page 81.*

For the first time since she had fairly started on her story May looked up and met her stepmother's eyes. They were full of tears, but the lips were struggling to smile, to speak. The girl was startled at these signs of pain. Had she said too much in this confession? Something of this doubt found utterance. Then the smile gained over the tears.

"Too much? My dear, you have done the best thing in the world for both of us. Now we can understand each other. Oh, you poor lonely little girl, — to think of all these weeks that you have suffered so! It makes my heart ache."

May heard these words with bewilderment.

"I thought I was acting for the best when I let things take their course, and waited. I thought you would resent my going forward, and all this time I was leaving you to such influence — no, I am not going to blame Cathy, altogether, but I ought to have gone forward to you at once. I could have trusted the girl who has been brave enough to tell the truth as you have. You would have done me justice, I am sure. But now

we are to be friends — you are not going — to hate — even the stepmother?"

She smiled and put out her hand, as she said this, taking May's cold little fingers in hers. "No, not even the stepmother, my dear," smiling now a little archly. "You have something to forgive her, perhaps, for coming to you with so little warning. But I had not intended to — to come so soon. It was an accident. My old guardian with whom I had lived since I was a child, was failing in health, and wished to break up his household and go abroad; but he made it a point that I must be married before he went. He was very fond of your father and had great trust in him, and he wanted to transfer the care of my property, as well as of myself, to his hands at once. I had not intended to make this change for six months at least; but when your father joined with my guardian in urging it, I yielded, and was guided by him, as we are all guided by those we love and trust. Your father would have told you all this, no doubt, if you had been a little older, but girls seem even younger than they are, to fathers, you know; and

fathers, — I suppose fathers seem very old to young daughters like you, May, — too old to have any right to begin again a home-life with somebody else. But your father is not an old man; he is what is called 'in the prime of life,' and probably has many years before him; and, May, your dear mother, when she knew that she must leave you both, said to him: 'Don't live alone long. Find somebody whom you can love and who will love you and be good to May.' And, my dear, I love him very much, and I want to 'be good to May,' and love her too, if she will let me."

May looked up into the kind eyes without a word, but her fingers closed with a warm pressure about the hand that held hers, and Mrs. Bartlett felt quite content with such an answer.

On the last day of June of this same year, the Bartlett grounds were gay with tents and arches and all the rest of the pretty arrangements that go to make up a garden-party, especially when the garden-party is also a birthday-party.

"Oh, look! isn't it perfectly beautiful?" cried Susy

Morris to Joanna, as the two went in under the gateway arch. "Just look, Joanna, there is her name, 'May,' and underneath, 'fifteen,' — made of rose-buds."

But if the girls were delighted with this rosebud spelling of May's name and age, how must they have felt when a few steps farther on they found themselves under a flowery tent where stood May and Mrs. Bartlett, distributing to each guest, as they welcomed each, a little nosegay of rosebuds tied with ribbon? It was a perfect day, — all blue sky and sunshine and soft breezes, and everywhere the scent of roses; for the Bartlett gardens and hothouses were noted for their beautiful roses. The guests began to arrive at three o'clock; the party was to be from that hour until seven. The first to arrive were the seminary class, — Joanna and Susy, Elsie and Cathy Bond, with the dozen other girls who made up the number. Each one was in white, Cathy in a brand-new white nun's veiling, with knots of red ribbon here and there, and a bunch of red roses at her girdle. May could n't help thinking of the scarlet kalmia and the night that it

was worn, as she greeted her. Cathy herself, if she did not recall the kalmia, could not but remember that first party, and her cheeks flushed until they matched her flowers, as she stood before Mrs. Bartlett. But that lady was kindness itself. There was not a note in her voice, nor a look in her eyes that recalled anything of that past disagreeable experience.

"I hope when I am a woman I shall know how to behave just like that," said Joanna, energetically, as she and Susy strolled off down one of the garden paths, after leaving the reception tent.

"Just like what — like whom?" asked Susy, in rather a dazed way.

"Why, like Mrs. Bartlett. Did you see how nice and easy she was to Cathy, as if Cathy had always been nice to her, — how she took pains to change the pink rosebuds tied with pink ribbon, for red ones tied with red ribbon, when she saw Cathy's dress? I'm sure Cathy ought to *love* her now, and not be offish any more."

"'Offish?'" repeated Susy, still in her queer, dazed little way.

"Yes, why you *know* how she's acted ever since that night of the party. She did n't go near May to inquire how her ankle was, until it was nearly well, and then she went with one of the teachers; and since then she has only been to the house once, — once in all these six months, — and she has had hardly anything to say to May since!"

"Well, but, Joanna, I think that's because she's been ashamed and sorry. I think both of them, she and May, have felt ashamed and sorry, and that made them feel queer, and keep away from each other. I — *I* think that 'way down in her heart Cathy would like to — to love Mrs. Bartlett, and to have her love her a little; for, Joanna, did you notice Cathy's new dress, and did you notice her hair? She might have had the skirt made long if she had chosen to, but she did n't; it's at the top of her boots, like ours, and instead of piling her hair up high, as she did that night, it is braided and tied with ribbon. Now, *I* think that shows something how Cathy feels."

"Well, but, Susy, she has been so stiff with May

and all the rest of us, whenever Mrs. Bartlett's name has been mentioned; and don't you remember when May came back, after she got well, and there were a lot of us in my room together one day, and one of the girls said something about a stepmother, and May broke out and made a sort of confession of the mistakes she had made about *her* stepmother, and explained, and took back ever so many things, — don't you remember that right in the midst of her talk that Cathy stuck up that little chin of hers and marched out of the room?"

"Yes, I remember; but, Joanna, I can see how Cathy felt. She felt mortified, and that made her feel cross; and she felt, too, that May was as much to blame as she was, in — in telling her things, and so, — well, sort of asking for her pity, and encouraging her to talk. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see, you dear little peace-patcher, but, all the same, I think Cathy might have pocketed her 'cross' and just said something, — a word or two that was nice about Mrs. Bartlett, after being treated so sweetly by her."

"Cathy *did* say to me once, when we were alone, that she guessed May's stepmother was going to turn out better than we expected."

"*She* guessed May's stepmother was going to turn out better than *we* expected. Oh, Susy, that is rich! and it is just like Cathy."

"But I think that shows that she's coming 'round all right."

"Well, maybe she is; but it's coming *'round.* That's just it; not standing up fair and square and saying, like May, that she's been in the wrong. I hate round-about things, anyway."

"Yes, but Cathy's always been so at the head, here at school, so popular, that I suppose it was n't very easy for her to come out and *say* she had been in the wrong."

"She'd be a good deal *more* popular if she would come out like that. There's May; none of the girls ever liked her as they do now."

"Yes, I know, but — oh, hark, Joanna, there's a fiddle, two fiddles, listen! They're tuning up! We're going to have music!"

"And dancing! That 's what it means!"

The two girls scampered toward the sound. It led them around a corner to where stood a big square tent, open at both ends, and charmingly decorated; on a little raised platform above the main flooring sat two fiddlers and a harper tuning their instruments.

"Tum ti tum, tum ti tum," sung Joanna, as the sweet scraping of a fiddle-bow started off on a bar of the "Lancers." The players smiled and dashed into a swifter movement, and Joanna, catching Susy about the waist, went dancing with her down the floor as light of heart as of foot. By the time they had reached the length of the tent, other girls came flocking in, and the harp, joining with the fiddles, set them all in motion.

In another part of the grounds there was tennis for those who liked it, and one could hear the jubilant calls of "play," "'vantage," ringing out and mingling with the dance-music until late in the afternoon. Then came the bountiful supper, served under the trees from prettily arranged little tables, to which all the guests

came flocking with hearty outdoor appetites. Long before seven o'clock, all the guests had declared that it was the very prettiest party they had ever attended, and that they had never had such a "perfectly beautiful time."

At the very last, the crowning fun for the four seminary girls came, when May drove them home in the village wagon. It was a roomy wagon, but five of them — just think of it! I don't know how they ever crowded in, but they did, and Mrs. Bartlett helped them do it, laughing like a girl herself.

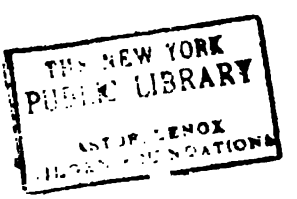
As May turned the pony's head, Susy exclaimed, —

"But this is n't the old pony, — old Jimmy!"

"No, this is a new one. Is n't he a beauty? It 's Mamma's birthday present to me, — bought with her own money, — and — and it was she who gave me the wagon in the autumn. I did n't know it until Papa told me this morning."

There was the least little bit of a conscious pause, then they all began to talk briskly of the pony's merits, and in the middle of this talk May asked Cathy if she would n't like to drive. There was nothing that could




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"Good-night, Mrs. Bartlett; I've had a lovely time."—*Page 91.*

have pleased Cathy more, and she took the pretty red reins from May with a delighted "Thank you."

Mrs. Bartlett was waiting to smile her final good-byes to them as they drove up the driveway past the piazza, and it was just then, as they went whisking by, that Cathy, with a bright red blush, kissed her hand, and called out sweetly above the others' voices, —

"Good-night, Mrs. Bartlett; I 've had a lovely time."

Susy, cuddled down in the bottom of the wagon close up against Joanna, breathed a little sigh of satisfaction, and gave a little squeeze to Joanna's hand.

JU-JU'S CHRISTMAS PARTY.



THE party is mine if it *is* on Christmas Eve, — my birthday-party. Mamma said so."

"Now, Ju."

"She did. She said, 'You can have a party (a birthday-party) on the 24th, — Christmas Eve.'"

"*A* birthday-party. Yes, that 's just it, — *a* birthday party, not *your* birthday party."

"Well, I should like to know if the 24th of December is n't *my* birthday? Were any of the rest of you born on the 24th of December, I should like to know?"

"No; but that's nothing. Christmas Eve is Christmas Eve, — everybody's holiday; and just because you happened to be born on that day, and Mamma said we might have a party — "

"*I* might have a party."

"A birthday-party on that night," persisted the other, "you want to claim the whole thing, you Greedy. Now Mamma meant that *as* your birthday did come on the 24th, we might all celebrate it *with* you and *for* you in a birthday-party."

"I never heard anything so perfectly ridiculous," responded Julia, in a high, exasperated voice. "You know just as well as I do that what you say is n't true; but you are the most aggravating boy, Clem Brown."

"What's the row? What's the Judge up to?" cried another of the Brown boys, coming forward from his corner at the end of the room, where he had been deep in the perusal of one of Jules Verne's books. In a few excited words Julia spoke up in explanation. Then Clem presented his view of the case in that teasing, aggravating way of his. Jimmy Brown laughed at this

presentation, — a laugh that Julia was about to resent hotly, when, —

"Well, you're the cheekiest fellow!" burst from Jimmy's lips. In the next breath, however, he turned to Julia with the words: "But what do you care anyhow whether he says it's *your* party or *a* party. That does n't spoil the party, does it?"

"Of course it does, or would, for Clem says as *a* party each of the children has as much right to say who shall be invited as I have. Fancy Clem's chum, that horrid Bob Smith, among *my* guests!"

"'*My* guests!' — hear her!" shouted Clement. "Ju's an out-and-out snob. All the people she cares for are swells. I know what she's up to. She's going to invite that English girl she's met at dancing-school, — that Betty Telephone, whose father was a lord, or the cousin of a lord, and she wants to muster a lot of swells to meet her."

Jimmy gave another little snickering laugh at this. Clem was *so* funny! But Julia cried out indignantly, —

"It is n't funny; it's vulgar to make sport of people

and twist their names like that. Betty Templeton is a lovely girl, and of course I 'm going to invite her."

"She does n't begin to be so nice as Bessy Pemberton."

"Bessy Pemberton!" in a scornful tone.

"Yes, Bessy Pemberton, Miss Ju; and, come now, do you mean that you 're going to leave out Bessy?"

"Bessy Pemberton would n't come if I should invite her. She never goes to parties — dress parties — like this. She does n't have suitable things to wear. She as good as told Alice King so in the beginning of the winter."

Clement Brown jumped up from the little chair in which he had been lazily rocking, and cried out in real earnest disgust, "Oh, I would n't be a girl for anything. They do the meanest things, — things a boy would n't think of doing. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Ju, to slight a nice girl like Bessy Pemberton because she has n't got a lot of money, and her mother has to keep school."

"'Keep school!'" repeated Julia, sarcastically, and growing cool as Clement grew hot. "Mrs. Pemberton

is a governess, and goes out by the day. She goes to the Templetons to teach Betty and her younger sisters."

"And that's the reason you don't want the Telephone to meet Bessy at *your* party! Oh, you make me tired! Mrs. Pemberton is the best kind of a lady."

"You don't understand, Clem. The Pembertons are not in society. They are nice enough, but they can't afford —"

"'Not in society,'" mimicked Clem. "What do you know about society, a girl of fifteen like you? It's regular poll-parrot talk."

"Adelaide says —" began Julia.

"Oh, bother what Adelaide says! Adelaide says too much. I'm sick and tired of all this stuff. It was bad enough when we lived in Boston; but since we came to Washington to live, it's ten times as bad. The airs that Adelaide puts on now, and that you copy, are just too much."

"Adelaide is a young lady now, and because she doesn't have time to listen to you and to laugh at your jokes, you think she puts on airs. She was only fifteen

when we left Boston; she is seventeen now, and out in society." As Julia concluded with this "out in society," she gave a deep, envious sigh.

"Yes, there you go with your silly talk about being 'out.' I wish we were all *in* Boston, down on old Mount Vernon Street. We had some fun there! Here there is n't room for anybody or anything but fuss and flummery of one kind or another."

"I should like to know what you mean by 'fuss and flummery'?" asked Julia, with a little air of dignity that always exasperated Clem and made him rougher than ever.

"You know well enough what I mean. I mean all this setting up to be fashionable; this party business all the time; this running after big people."

"'Setting up to be fashionable!' How you talk! What would Mamma say to hear you? I guess she 'd tell you that we don't *set* up to be anything; and as to running after big people, we do nothing of the kind. The Browns, I'm sure, are above that sort of thing. We have a very good position, for Papa is —"

"Oh, I know what you 're going to say. I heard you clipping it off to that little Wing girl the other day, — 'Papa is an eminent lawyer.' You 'd better let somebody else say that, Ju, and Papa himself would tell you so. He hates brag; and Ju," — with final emphasis, — "he hates snobs, too."

"Snobs? snobs? What are snobs?" piped a childish voice here.

Clem turned around with a "Hollo, Popsy!"

Popsy, a little maid of three, dropped her sister Adelaide's hand, and ran to Clem with a "Take me up."

Clem took her up, and rather clumsily began to remove her hat and cloak, while Adelaide came forward, drawing off her gloves. Adelaide was the eldest of the Brown family, — a tall girl, a young lady of seventeen, who called her brothers and sisters "the children." As she came forward she said, —

"What have you children been quarrelling about now? Whom were you calling snobs, Clem?"

"Snobs? What are snobs?" piped Popsy; and catch-

ing the scowl on Clem's brow, "Somesin' narsy that make Clem and Popsy sick?"

"Yes, that 's just what they are, — something very nasty, Popsy. They are nastier than measles."

Popsy had just recovered from the measles, and had a most vivid recollection of her discomfort. Sniffing up her little nose, she said emphatically, "Popsy, never, never have *them*."

Clem and Jimmy were choking with laughter, but Clem steadied his voice to say, "Ju-ju has got 'em bad, Popsy." Popsy's eyes grew big. "Poor Ju-ju!" she said, "get doctor for Ju-ju."

Julia's face was red with anger, but without so much as a glance at those "horrid boys," she crossed the room, and held out her hand to her little sister with the words, "Come, Popsy; come with me and see what I 've got for you upstairs."

Popsy looked at Julia's flushed face, and a sudden memory of a talk she had heard when she was ill of measles being "catching" flashed into her mind. As Julia approached nearer, she waved her back with a

swift, significant gesture of two tiny palms, and a shrill, "Go 'way? go 'way! narsy snobs! tatchin'; make Popsy sick!"

This was too much for the boys. They could control themselves no longer, and flinging their heads backward, fairly shrieked with laughter, in which little Popsy joined, in ignorant baby glee, crying at the same time, "Go 'way! go 'way!"

Julia, in high dudgeon, dashed out of the room, banging the door behind her, yet unable to shut in the uproarious merriment, in which even Adelaide's — dignified Adelaide — silvery tones could be heard. But after the first explosive burst, and the boys were beginning to catch their breath sufficiently to exchange comments with each other, Adelaide demanded a full explanation.

What was it all about? And Clem told her, making a fair enough statement, spite of his different way of looking at things. Adelaide listened without interruption, but Clem knew that she was not on his side. And he was right, for when he had had his say, she unhesitatingly declared that he was not only unjust but absurd.

"Hum!" growled Clem; "I might have known you 'd back up Ju's notions, and, of course, *you* don't see anything unjust in slighting Bessy Pemberton, because she 's poor and her mother 's — a governess."

"Now, Clem," interrupted Adelaide, "if Bessy has said that she does n't go to parties because she has nothing suitable to wear, of course she means that she does n't expect to be invited. Indeed, what would be the use?"

"Oh!" cried Clem, jumping up, "you 're as bad as Ju, every bit. Come, Popsy," — hoisting the child to his shoulder, — "we won't go to any of their parties, will we?"

"Yes; Popsy go to party. Popsy go to party and have nice sings."

"What! go to party with a lot of snobs?"

"No, no, no; narsy snobs not go. Popsy go, and Clemmy and Jimmy. Popsy have party all herself, — Popsy's own party, — and Clemmy and Jimmy and Bessy Pen'ton come."

"Hooray, Pops! you 're a brick and no mistake;" and

with an extra toss, which made Popsy scream with delight, Clem went prancing out of the room with her.

Tap, tap, tap, went Julia's fingers on the door of a little room at the top of the house.

"Who is it? What is wanting?" asked a voice within the room.

"It 's Julia. Can't you let me come in for one minute, Amy?"

"Yes, but you must wait a second."

Julia waited one, two, three seconds with serene patience, knowing perfectly well that Amy was putting out of sight some Christmas mystery, — her own (Julia's) special present very likely, which was in the process of manufacture. One, two, three seconds, then "Now you may come in" gave Julia the desired permission to enter.

"I won't stay a minute, Amy, but I wanted to know if you had written the invitations."

"Oh, Julia, that is just what I wanted to speak to you about. I could n't find the list you gave me."

Julia's face fell. "I'm so sorry, Ju; but I'll drop everything now, and take a new list if you'll call the names off, and then I'll write the notes and send them at once, so that there won't be much delay."

Julia could have cried with vexation; but what could she say? How could she reproach or find fault with Amy, who was so kind and obliging always?—Amy, who even now was making her something beautiful, she had n't a doubt, for a Christmas present. She had asked Amy, too, as a special favor, to write these notes of invitation, for one reason, because of all the family Amy wrote the prettiest hand. Then Amy was not a very observing little person,—was "not meddlesome," as Julia put it,—and therefore would not be likely to ask any troublesome questions in regard to those who were or were not invited. Julia herself, spite of being two years older than Amy, wrote detestably at the best of times; but just now she could scarcely make an intelligible letter, owing to the badly bruised forefinger of her right hand. Sitting there and calling off her list, and noting with what rapidity Amy wrote them down, the

vexation began to disappear. After all, there would n't be very much delay. Unobservant as Amy was, however, Julia did wonder a little if she would say anything, would make any comment at the name of Betty Templeton, and the omission of that of Bessy Pemberton. But Amy made no comment whatever, and with a deep sigh of relief Julia betook herself from the little room, with a final assurance from Amy that the notes should be written and sent as soon as possible. This was on the afternoon of Thursday. On Friday morning early, Amy announced to Julia that the notes had gone. On Monday the answers began to arrive. By Tuesday they came in thick and fast, for Julia had invited very well brought up young people, who knew that party invitations should be answered promptly. By Wednesday morning everybody had sent an answer but one person, and that person was Betty Templeton. What could it mean? Did Betty intend to snub her for presuming to invite her? With an uneasy pang Julia recalled the real slightness of her acquaintance with Miss Templeton. She had met her at a private dancing class once a week

for two months, and in that time the English girl had responded pleasantly enough to Julia's lively advances; but Julia was obliged to admit to herself that she had *not* responded with a great deal of warmth. Julia had hitherto attributed this lack of warmth to "the shy English way;" but now in her secret soul she began to have a humiliating feeling that this "English way" might have covered something more than indifference. "But how could she be so rude anyway as not to answer the invitation, even to decline it?"

"What's the matter with Ju-ju?" asked Clem of his sister Amy that Wednesday morning.

"Matter?" Amy looked up from her book, inquiringly.

"Yes, matter. She's as glum and grum as she can be. Something's gone wrong, I'll bet."

Julia at that moment was watching for the postman on his second trip, her face close to the big window in the drawing-room downstairs. When she saw him coming toward the house, she flew to the door. Yes, there was a note for her, — the note she was looking for,

she had not a doubt; and flinging the rest of the mail upon the hall table, she then and there tore open the pretty square envelope, taking care even in her haste not to break the "B" that was so deftly stamped in the seal.

But what — what — *what* did this mean?

"Miss Bessy Pemberton accepts, with pleasure, Miss Julia Brown's kind invitation."

After one moment — one dazed moment — of astonishment, stung with a horrible suspicion, Julia turned and sped swiftly up the stairs and toward the sitting-room, where she knew she should find her brother Clement; for this was Clem's doings, she was perfectly certain.

Clem was busy sorting over his collection of foreign stamps as she dashed into the room, flinging the door open so violently that the draught of air scattered a whole row of stamps.

"Hollo! Look out! What are you doing?" he exclaimed.

"What am *I* doing? You horrid boy, I've found out what *you've* been doing," and with an angry move-

ment, Bessy Pemberton's note was tossed into Clem's lap.

Clem read it, and then regarded Julia with profound amazement. What had he to do with Bessy Pemberton's note? And as soon as he could catch his breath, he asked the question.

"What have *you* to do with it, indeed! You need n't play off innocence like this. You know perfectly well, Clem Brown, that *you* wrote the note of invitation to Bessy Pemberton, and substituted it for that to Betty Templeton. You were determined that you would have *your* way. Oh, *I* know now why you were off so early Friday morning with the mail."

Clem started up, regardlessly scattering his cherished stamps in every direction. "I don't wonder you think other people can do mean things," he began in a high voice. "Anybody who can — "

"Hush, Clem! Wait! Listen to me, Julia. It was I who wrote the note to Bessy Pemberton," and Amy came forward, looking perplexedly from brother to sister.

"You, Amy?" ejaculated Julia.

"Yes, I wrote Bessy Pemberton's name on the list as you called it off."

"I didn't call Bessy Pemberton s name; but I did call Betty Templeton's."

"Well, then, I misunderstood it for Bessy Pemberton. They sound so much alike, I suppose that is how I made the mistake; and of course I thought Bessy Pemberton would be invited, and I *never* thought of Betty Templeton."

Julia flushed redly. Amy had been shut up in her little room, out of the hot discussion that had taken place a few days ago, and it had not been repeated to her. In fact, the discussions and quarrels were not generally repeated to her, for Amy was too little quarrelsome herself to have much sympathy with such discussions. There was something, too, about Amy that made it difficult for any of the family to show their worst side to her. She was not in the least a little prig, but there was about her a fine generous sort of nobility that took nobility in others for granted; and it is hard to dis-

play ignoble instincts in such company. So now Julia flinched and flushed as her own petty little worldliness was revealed so suddenly to Amy. If Amy had missed Bessy at the party she could have explained the matter to her very satisfactorily; but now, convicted by her own angry words, and with Clem going on with his gibes and jeers, the whole matter was revealed in a most unsatisfactory light.

If only Amy would gibe and jeer too, then she could have it out with her; but Amy said not a word, not even of comment. She only stood and looked at her sister for a second or two as if she could scarcely believe what she had heard; then, still silent, she left the room.

Disappointed, defeated, and humiliated, Julia burst into tears. Clem hated tears, and gathering up his scattered treasures, without another word he betook himself to his own and Jimmy's special sanctum at the top of the house, where, later, he regaled Jimmy with a lively account of how Julia had been outwitted in spite of herself.

He was in the thick of this narrative when a voice outside called, "Jimmy! Jimmy!" It was Mamma's voice. Nurse had a bad headache, and she wanted Jimmy to take Popsy for a walk. Clem at once offered to join this expedition, but Mamma shook her head. The boys were twins, fourteen years old; but the Judge, as they called Clem, because of his argumentative qualities, was not a particle like easy little Jimmy. Clem was always up to some uproarious fun, and therefore not always to be trusted on sober expeditions. Jimmy was to be trusted always — without Clem.

Down the beautiful broad avenue went Popsy, clinging to Jimmy's hand, and chatting to him in the most sociable manner. All at once Jimmy was astonished by the little fingers suddenly dropping from his, and the shrill voice calling out loudly, "Ju-ju! Ju-ju!" He looked up. Yes, sure enough, there was Ju-ju ahead of them. He tried to catch, to stop Popsy, who had started on a run, calling at the top of her voice, "Ju-ju! Ju-ju!" But Ju-ju had heard, and turned. She had come out to be away from everybody in the house, she

was so unhappy, so full of disappointment and vexation; but who could resist that little outstretched palm, and the sweet, smiling invitation, "Ju-ju, come a walk with Jimmy and Popsy."

Popsy had forgotten by this time the "narsy snobs" that were "tatchin'," and hand in hand with her brother and sister she trotted happily along between them, more sociable than ever. But poor Julia's ears were closed to all this sociability. She could think of nothing but her disappointment and defeat. Even the little sharp smart of shame that had stung her in Amy's presence had for the moment disappeared. To have Betty Templeton at her party had been a pet plan for weeks. Now it was not only that she must be disappointed in that, for even Adelaide had told her that it was too late to think of sending an invitation at that time to one she knew so little, but she must bear all the mortification of the defeat of her plans, which she knew that Clem at least would be chuckling in triumph over.

"No, you must n't think of sending an invitation now," Adelaide had charged her. "You could n't explain

the matter anyway in a note of invitation to one who is almost a stranger."

Julia was thinking of all this as Popsy prattled, and was saying to herself, "If only there was *some* way" — when, just as they turned the corner of the avenue, whom should she meet face to face but — Betty Templeton! Oh, here *was* a way surely! She could and she *would* say what she must n't write, and stopping short, she began eagerly, —

"Oh, Miss Templeton, there has been such a mistake about an invitation that should have been sent to you for my birthday-party. I have only just found it out, and I thought it was too late — that I could n't *write* an explanation; but if you *would* come now. My sister, who wrote the invitations for me, misunderstood. As I called the list off, she mistook your name — "

"O — h!" suddenly roared Popsy, as her little feet slipped up on the icy sidewalk, and she fell forward out of Jimmy's loose hold, flat on her little button nose. It took a minute or two to set the child on her feet and to comfort her. When this was done, Julia started to take

up her thread of explanation; but what was this that Miss Templeton was saying, and in a cordial way that Julia had never found in her before?

Yes, she had heard about the party. Bessy Pemberton had told her; and they were all so glad that Bessy had concluded to go. Bessy was so foolish at first, and said she had nothing to wear; but that was all nonsense, for, as she — Betty — had told her, "her pretty gray cashmere was quite nice enough to wear."

Julia was speechless with surprise at this revelation of intimacy with Bessy Pemberton. But she was destined to still further surprise. Betty had turned and joined them in their walk. "The shy English manner" had entirely disappeared, and she was talking freely, like any other girl of fourteen, — indeed, with an outright simple frankness that English people, when they once get started, are much more capable of than Americans.

Would she come to the party now? She certainly would if her mother would permit her; and she thought very likely she might, if Bessy went. "Mamma thinks so much of Bessy, and so do I. To tell the truth," she

went on, laughing and coloring and stammering, as she had a habit of doing, "I — I have n't felt at home with any of the American girls here except Bessy. Most of you seem so much older than we English girls. You — you seem to be like fashionable young ladies almost, and you — you 'll forgive me now — but I thought *you* were" — laughing outright — "the worst of any of them, you seemed so fine, you know. But when — when I found that you knew Bessy Pemberton — that you were old friends in Boston — I knew that you must be a nice girl. I mean my kind of a nice girl, that I could have a nice time with when I got better acquainted with you; and I — I should be very pleased to come to your party with Bessy, if Mamma says that I may. I have always wanted to go to a Christmas party in America."

The hot color was burning like fire in Julia's face. She had been saved as by a miracle from that foolish explanation, — that bungling little lie by which she had tried even to humbug herself, — that Bessy did not expect, did not wish for, invitations. She had been

saved from this, and — Betty was coming to her party! But oh, how small, how mean she felt! For underneath her vain little worldliness Julia had a heart, and a sense of justice and honor, and to stand there and receive this warmth of cordiality because she was thought to be Bessy's friend, — she who had been doing her best to treat Bessy in a most unfriendly manner, — was unbearable! And how she had blundered in her estimates of persons! She had supposed the Templetons would look down upon their governess's daughter as a very inferior person. And they had found her more to their taste than any other American girl; and she, Julia Brown, had only reached Betty Templeton's favor because she was "Bessy's friend."

Poor Julia! as thought after thought rushed through her mind, her feeling of humiliation increased. In one way she had got her heart's desire, — Betty was to be her guest; but as she parted from her at the end of the walk, it was with a miserable sense that she herself was a sneak and a hypocrite, whom Betty would justly despise if she knew the truth. That Jimmy had heard every

word of the talk she knew quite well; and though he was gentleman enough to make no comment then, she knew equally well that he could never keep silent with Clem. If it had been Amy, Amy would have spared her; but Jimmy could no more help telling Clem everything than he could help breathing, and by night — by night Clem would know the whole. Julia drew in her breath at the anticipation of Clem's teasing jeers and sarcasms. She would be at his mercy now, without a single plea for herself. But night came, and the next day, and not a word did she hear. *Had* Jimmy kept silent? No; Jimmy had told the whole, not only of Betty's talk, but of Julia's reception of it.

"Clem, Ju-ju was so red and ashamed, I pitied her. She looked as if you'd knocked her down and stamped on her; and I think she *is* pretty well knocked down, don't you?"

"Well, I should say so," agreed Clem.

"And Clem," went on Jimmy, "we won't say anything to her now, will we? We never do hit a fellow when he's down, you know."



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"And in the midst of all this green and flowery splendor there stood the hostess in a white gown." — *Page 117*.

And Clem agreed to this too, and another day went, and the next brought Christmas Eve.

The house was all alight from top to bottom, and in the parlors and halls and up the stairway was a perfect little forest of evergreen.

"Oh, how pretty!" whispered Betty Templeton to her friend Bessy, as they passed in between rows of little fragrant spruce-trees. In the parlor she was still more delighted, for from the green arch over the door, with Julia's name and age spelled out in little pink asters, to the splendor of blossoms set against the fragrant green background to the left and the right of her, everything was novel to the young English girl. She knew all about English holly and mistletoe; but this wild thick richness of spiky greenery, and the contrast of the great white chrysanthemums and pink and purple asters, with which the room was largely decorated, made an odd but charming picture to her. And in the midst of all this green and flowery splendor there stood the hostess in a white gown, as simply dressed as an English girl,—as herself, for instance,—

and greeting her with a blushing, half-shy cordiality that put Betty at her ease at once. Bessy Pemberton, who came in for a share of this greeting, wondered a little at this queer air of shyness in Julia, — Julia, whom she usually had seen so self-possessed under all circumstances. But Clem and Jimmy and Amy, who were standing near by, watchfully observant, understood the matter better. At the first, Julia, full of her shame and vexation, was sure that she should have a horrid time at this party she had so anticipated; and even Clem and Jimmy had agreed that they wished it was all over. "For Julia won't be herself at all," Jimmy had said early in the day, as he had seen his sister going about with a nervous, preoccupied manner; and Clem had responded, "Ju 'll be cranky and disagreeable for a certainty, and the whole thing 'll be a failure, and nobody 'll have a good time."

But they were all wrong. Everybody had the best of good times, from — yes, from Julia herself, who did n't deserve it, you may say, down to little Popsy. Nobody could have been more astonished at having a good

time than Julia. She had had a very bad time up to the very last moment, — that moment when she stood in the parlor awaiting her guests, and felt her cheeks burn as Bessy Pemberton came into the room. And then it was somehow from the instant that Bessy's brown eyes met hers with a beaming pleasure, and Bessy's voice said softly, "Oh, everything looks so lovely, like a fairy palace, that it's lovely to be here, Ju-ju," — then it was that Julia suddenly said to herself that the least she could do to atone for what she could never confess to Bessy was to carry out this lovely seeming, and make Bessy and everybody have a lovely good time to correspond with it. Yes, this was the least that she could do. She had thought about herself enough, — herself and her own good time. Of course that was over now; there could be no good time for her. She had spoiled all that; but she could see to it that the rest, and Bessy especially, enjoyed themselves. And from this moment Ju-ju, for the time, was the pleasantest, charmingest Ju-ju that any one had ever seen. She didn't, as upon other occasions,

insist upon *her* way, but with a new-born timidity followed rather than led, and let the others have *their* way. This was of itself so uncommon an experience that she presently enjoyed it; and by and by she was surprised to see how smoothly and merrily things were going, without a hitch, without a jar anywhere.

It was at the very height of this merriment, when the big tree was being pulled of its Christmas fruit, each guest receiving a pretty box of bonbons with some comic little toy, that Julia happened to glance up from the Yankee puzzle she was explaining to Betty Templeton, and caught Clem and Jimmy regarding her with a look of curious interest. For a moment she forgot what she was saying to Betty in the thought of what Clem might be saying to Jimmy, for she was sure that Clem was criticising her in his usual sharp fashion, — was probably commenting sarcastically upon her attention to "that English girl." If she only could have heard her brothers' conversation! She might not have relished the whole of it; but she would not have found a jot or tittle of the usual sarcastic sharpness, for this is what the boys were saying to each other, —

"After all, we've had a jolly good time, haven't we, Clem?"

"Well, we have," answered Clem.

"And, Clem," went on Jimmy, "I never saw Ju-ju so nice before, did you?"

"No; and it just shows that Ju's got it in her to be nice if she didn't put on a lot of airs and strain after big folks. But I never saw her *hold out* so nice before, that's a fact. The first of the evening I thought we were going to have the meanest kind of a time."

"So did I. Clem, girls are like boys a good deal, aren't they?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know that little Fraser fellow on Massachusetts Avenue?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't you know how sassy and uppish he was until Tom Peyton 'disciplined' him? Ju-ju's been disciplined." Jimmy gave one of his little snickers here, remembering, as he did, Tom Peyton's choice of words, and the kind of discipline that he had admin-

istered to "the little Fraser fellow." Presently resuming more seriously, and carrying out the thread of his thought, "I told you, Clem, that day after the walk, that Ju-ju looked as if she had been knocked down and stamped on."

If Ju-ju could have heard!

But Ju-ju just then had forgotten even to wonder what the boys were talking about, for Betty Templeton and Bessy were bidding her good-night, were telling her what a beautiful time they had had, and were thanking her for it, and Bessy was saying, "I only hope you 've had half such a good time, Ju-ju," when, like a flash, there came home to Julia the conviction that out of her bad time she had, after all, unexpectedly drawn a little plum of sweetness, — really a good time for herself out of the good time that she had made for the others.

A NEW-YEAR'S CALL.

CHAPTER I.



"NOW you just wait; they 'll come along in a minute or two. Yes, yes; there they are! Look! see!" and Theodora Patterson pulled her sister back to the window with a close little clutch upon the pretty, long, trailing tea-gown, — a clutch that some young ladies would have resented very much. But Eleanor Patterson was a pleasant-tempered young lady, and was besides very fond of her little lame sister; so, with only a mild, remonstrating "Don't, dear!" she gently loosened the hand that pulled her gown awry, and looked out upon the street at the two children who were passing slowly by.

"Are n't they sweet, Eleanor?" asked Theodora, enthusiastically.

"They seem to be nice children," replied Eleanor.

"Nice! Oh, Eleanor!"

Eleanor laughed. She was used to Theo's enthusiasms. Indeed, the whole family were, and they often laughed at the way in which Theo would "go on" over what seemed to them not at all interesting. For several weeks now she had watched the two children she had pointed out to her sister, walking slowly past the house every day in the neighborhood of three o'clock. At first her attention had been directed to the younger of the two, — a rosy, sturdy little fellow in a navy-blue coat, with a big funny fur collar and cap. But when she looked up from the rosy face, she saw another face that pleased her quite as much. It pleased her more and more as she saw it day after day; and when presently the bright dark eyes caught her glance and returned it, and a pair of sweet red lips smiled upon her, she felt as if she had indeed made a very desirable acquaintance. Grown-up Eleanor, how-

ever, saw this exchange of glances and smiles between the two girls, and thought to herself, —

"Well, this is going rather too far. It's all very well for poor little Theo to amuse herself by watching people pass by; but it won't do for her to get familiar with them like this, for there's no knowing where she'll stop. She's such a soft-hearted little thing, she never sees the difference in people; all her geese are swans."

Something of this Eleanor tried to convey to Theo. Theo, however, did not seem to understand. In fact, she was so taken up with her new acquaintances that she scarcely heard Eleanor's hints and suggestions. Eleanor saw that she did not, and concluded to lay the case before her mother.

"But the child is always amusing herself like that," said Mrs. Patterson, after she had heard the story.

"Yes, she is always watching the people in the street, and weaving little romances about them; but she usually changes from one to another. This has been going on for weeks, — this particular fancy, — and it has pro-

gressed into quite a familiar acquaintanceship; and when she is wheeled out in her carriage she is likely to meet the children and make further acquaintance with them; and we don't know anything about them or whose children they are."

"No; that is true. What sort of children do they seem to be?" asked Mrs. Patterson.

"They are nice enough in one way, but I don't think they are children she would be likely to meet."

"Yes; I see. But — but Theo's life is so different from that of most children."

"Yes; but she is growing stronger, and will take her place by and by, perhaps, with other young girls of her — class." Eleanor was going to say "set." She changed it to "class," because "set" sounded narrow and snobbish, and Eleanor did not want to be either narrow or snobbish.

A few minutes before three o'clock the next afternoon, Mrs. Patterson, going into the front drawing-room, saw Theo sitting in a big chair, close up to the window, watching and waiting. She heard her mother's

step, and turned to her with a smile, exclaiming eagerly, —

"Oh, Mamma, you're just in time!"

"In time for what, dear?"

"To see my new friends. Eleanor saw them yesterday. Did she tell you? Such a dear, bright-looking girl, and such a cunning little brother! And I think, Mamma, that the nurse-girl is sick or gone away, for every day the sister herself takes her little brother to walk; there is never any nurse-girl with them."

"Perhaps *she* is the nurse-maid, and not, as you think, the child's sister."

"What! *my* girl? Oh, Mamma, when you see her — But there she is now. Look! look!"

And Mamma looked, and saw a slim, growing-up girl about the age of her Theo, but, unlike Theo, straight and strong and ruddy with health. She was comfortably yet rather oddly dressed in a dark green suit, with a little red cloth cap on her head. She was answering some question of the child's at the moment

Mrs. Patterson observed her, but her eyes were turned expectantly to the window; and the instant she caught sight of Theo, there came a smile and nod, to which Theo delightedly responded. The child, too, glanced up just then, and showed all his pretty baby teeth as he bobbed his curly head up and down.

"Oh, Mamma, are n't they dears? and oh! oh! may n't I open the window and ask them to come in? Oh, Mamma, *you* do it for me. Quick! quick! for I don't know their names, and we can't call after them."

"My dear child —"

"Oh, Mamma, hurry! they 're going out of sight."

"Theo, dear, we don't know them at all; they are strangers. What would they think?" This last question seemed the best argument, Mrs. Patterson thought, to reconcile Theo to not carrying out her proposition.

"Oh, Mamma, they would think just as I do, — that we 've got over being strangers, and are ready to be friends."

"But, my dear, it would n't be proper. People don't

rush forward like that without knowing anything about each other."

The tears came into Theo's eyes. She turned a straining, wistful gaze down the street where her unknown acquaintances were slowly disappearing from her view.

"I am so sorry, dearie, to disappoint you; but I really could n't allow you to make acquaintances like that. We have to know something about people before we invite them to visit us."

Mrs. Patterson, as she spoke, put her arm around Theo, and drew her gently toward her. Theo made no reply to her mother's words, and offered no remonstrance; but after a few minutes she asked, "Mamma, do you remember one day last winter when you took me to the matinée to see 'Little Lord Fauntleroy'?"

"Yes, my dear, I remember it very well," replied Mrs. Patterson.

"Well, and do you remember the children that sat in front of us, — two girls, — one of my age and one younger?"

"Yes."

"And do you remember that you — you took a fancy to those children, just as I have to these, and when we went out, and it rained, you asked them to come with us in the carriage, and the maid that was with them thanked you, and said that *their* carriage was to be sent, and they were to wait for it. Were n't they strangers, Mamma, just like my girl and her brother?"

"Y-es, they were strangers, but there was a difference. I — I saw at once that these children were — well, that they belonged to people that — that moved in the — best society."

"What *is* 'best society,' Mamma?"

"Oh, the people who come of the best families, — who are refined and cultivated."

"And rich, Mamma?"

"No, oh, no! they are not always rich."

"But, Mamma, there's Miss Morton, who teaches me. She is refined and cultivated. Is she in the best society?"

"Miss Morton is a very nice person, of course, but she is n't exactly in society."

"Does n't she come of one of the best families?"

"Well, she is from a very good family, I believe, — very respectable people."

"Did we come of one of the best families?"

Mrs. Patterson flushed. "Your Grandfather Lester was an able lawyer, and your Grandfather Patterson was a successful merchant."

"Yes, I know about Grandpa Patterson. I've heard Papa tell how he made his fortune, and climbed up from the place of errand-boy to the position of head of the firm."

There was a few minutes' pause after this; then suddenly Theo began again: "Mamma, what was it you saw or what was it you did n't see in *my* friends that was so different from those girls at the matinée?"

"I don't know that I can explain it to you, my dear, but there was something. Those little girls at the matinée had an unmistakable air of high breeding and careful training, and — style. *Your* little girl

and boy looked — well, as if they belonged to a different class of people; not as if they were cared *for*, but as if they were used to caring for themselves."

Theo lifted her head with a quick movement. "Mamma, perhaps their father now is just as Grandpa Patterson was once, when he was young, — climbing up; and as Grandpa was, he hasn't got to the top, and can't give his children much care."

Mrs. Patterson flushed again. Theo did say such queer things. "If it was not Theo, I should think it was sly and impertinent," the mother said once to her eldest daughter. But slyness and impertinence were out of the question where Theo was concerned. She was as open as the day, and innocent and inexperienced.

Before the flush had passed from Mrs. Patterson's cheeks, the innocent tongue resumed the subject once more.

"But, Mamma dear, I didn't care for those girls as you did. I didn't think they looked interesting, and I *do* think my girl and boy are interesting." Another little pause, then: "Oh, dear! I don't be-

lieve I like 'best society,' because it seems to me it leaves out almost all the interesting people! I suppose it left out Grandpa until he had climbed 'way up, and then he was all ready to go to heaven; and what would he care for 'best society' that was picked out by people here, when he could have the best that God had picked out in heaven?"

"Theo dear, look, it is beginning to snow," exclaimed Mrs. Patterson, suddenly. "By to-morrow, it may be, we shall have a sleigh-ride." She did not try to reply to her little daughter's last remark. "And what *could* I say?" she asked Eleanor, when, later, she repeated the conversation to her. Eleanor laughed, and declared that Theo was not to be managed by argument, for she always got the best of it there.

"But what shall I say to her to-morrow, Eleanor, for she won't give it up like this? She 'll look for those interesting children of hers just the same to morrow afternoon."

Eleanor laughed again. "Oh, leave it to me, Mamma. You have n't the least invention. I'll manage." And

Eleanor, who had a great deal of invention, did manage, her mother thought, beautifully. For she kept Theo amused at matinées and cycloramas and sleigh-rides until the end of the week. But oh, how tired poor Theo was on Saturday night! — so tired that on Sunday morning she did n't want to get up from her little white bed; so tired that she had to rest there not only on Sunday, but on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday, and the doctor who came to see her said that it might be many days before she would be rested enough to leave it. Poor Mrs. Patterson, — she did n't admire Eleanor's invention so much now; and Eleanor herself felt disturbed and worried at the result of her plans, though, as she assured her mother, she and 'Lisa, the maid, had been very careful of Theo.

In these quiet days in bed Theo thought a great deal, and not the least of these thoughts was about her two street friends. Where were they? she wondered. Did they still walk by the window every pleasant day at three o'clock? and had they walked there and missed her all these days that she had been in



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they knew me and liked me, and came, not just because they were invited, but because they wanted to see me, that would be nice."

Mrs. Patterson bent down and kissed the pale little face. "Is there *any*thing, Theo, that you would like for New-Year's Day?" she asked.

For a moment Theo hesitated; then she said quietly, "No, Mamma."

In that moment of hesitation she had thought of her little friends, — if she could watch for them at the parlor window and invite them in. But then she recalled her mother's words of a week ago. If consent were given now it would be because of her illness. There would be no real welcome for her guests, and that would rob the visit of its pleasure. At the hesitation, at the sound of the "No, Mamma," Mrs. Patterson turned again and asked, "Theo, are you sure there is nothing?"

The "No, Mamma," was more decided this time; but Mrs. Patterson wondered what it was that Theo would n't say.

CHAPTER II.

"I SHALL be back in a fortnight, Jessie."

"Yes, Papa."

"And you 'll be very careful of yourself and Bertie while I 'm gone?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Well, good-by, my dear. Good-by, Bertie, my boy," and Mr. Hamlin kissed first one and then the other of his children, lifting rosy, sturdy little Bertie for the last kiss, and a last injunction to take care of his sister.

"Yes, I take care her. I kill all 'e bugglers that come," answered Bertie, doubling up his small fat fists.

"What in the world does he mean?" asked the father.

"Bugglers — bugglers — bad bugglers that come in 'e night and 'teal! dat 's what I mean!" cried Bertie,

rather indignant at his father for not understanding him.

"He means burglars," laughed Jessie.

"Where did he hear anything of that kind?" asked Mr. Hamlin, frowning.

"I suppose he heard Ann talking about the robbery at Mr. Norton's last week," answered Jessie.

"'Es, 'es, robbers — bugglers — 'tole evwyt'ing, and f'ightened 'ittle Tommy 'mos' to def. Bertie won't be f'ightened at bugglers nor anysing. Bertie take his new gun and kill 'em!" and with this savage threat the boy laughed so gleefully that the father joined in the laugh, thinking that not much harm had come of Irish Ann's talk, after all, if his small son had caught such joyful, if sanguinary, inspiration from it; and so it was in a gayer mood altogether that he kissed him again, and said, —

"No; Bertie won't be frightened at anything, whatever happens, for Bertie is Papa's big brave boy."

The Hamlins lived in a little flat at the top of a high apartment-house. The family consisted of Mr.

Hamlin, Jessie, Bertie, and Ann McMullen, the maid-of-all-work. When Mrs. Hamlin died, two years ago, Bertie was a year old. And until within a few months there had been a nurse-maid for him; but when one day the maid was taken sick, and had to go away, they found that they could do very well without her, for Jessie was a bright, energetic girl, with a good deal of careful womanliness, and Ann, who had been with the family since Jessie's birth, and much attached to them all, was quite willing to look out for the boy when Jessie was away. This arrangement saved Mr. Hamlin not a little, which was a great consideration, for he was only a clerk, and his salary by no means large. Thirteen-year-old Jessie had been her father's companion so much that he talked very freely with her; and she understood perfectly the necessity for economy, and had in consequence become quite a clever little manager in many ways. But notwithstanding this rather premature shouldering of cares, the girl was a real girl, bright and joyous and full of the spirits of health and youth. Perhaps it was for

these very reasons of youth and health, united with the womanliness developed by circumstances, that she got on so nicely with her little brother; for while the womanly side of her kept her from spoiling him, her fund of spirits brought them together in the happiest sort of way.

"We are two chums, aren't we?" she said, laughingly, to the little fellow one day.

The term seemed to please the boy mightily, and from that time he would every now and then say to people, or to his sister herself, "Dessie and Bertie two chums."

That night after his father had gone, and his sister was sitting by his crib singing his favorite song, —

"Three blind mice,
See how they run!" —

the little voice suddenly piped out, with sly drollery, —

"Two bwave chums,
See how they wun!"

Jessie pounced down upon the roguish youngster with a kiss and a laugh, followed by the words, —

"Two brave chums,
See how they sleep!

you 'd better say, sir;" and then ensued a frolic, which ended in a gradual closing of the sleepy eyes, and a gradual subsiding of the little voice.

They had had an early tea that night on account of Mr. Hamlin's departure, and by six o'clock Ann McMullen had cleared everything away, and betaken herself to the other end of the city to see a sick cousin.

"I 'll be back by nine o'clock sure, Miss Jessie, and perhaps before," she said to the young housekeeper; and Jessie had assured her that that was quite time enough, for she had her French lesson to study, and should n't think of going to bed until half-past nine. The French lesson was a very interesting story of the French Revolution. It was so interesting that Jessie presently forgets everything else. She forgets so entirely that she is only roused by the tears in her eyes, and the tears have got into her throat, that smarts and stings. Oh, *how* it smarts and stings! and what — what is this,

— this strange atmosphere? With a sudden cry the girl leaps to her feet and flings down her book. Then for a second she stands petrified with a terrible fear. In the next instant she runs with flying steps to the door that leads into the common hall, and throws it open to see, to know that the strange atmosphere is a curling cloud of smoke; that the house is on fire! With a life-saving instinct she shuts the door, and running to the little crib in the bedroom, seizes the sleeper in her arms.

"Bertie, Bertie, wake up! wake up!"

Bertie opens his eyes, only to close them again with the weight of baby slumber.

"Oh, Bertie, Bertie, wake up! — wake up, and come with sister!"

At the sharp agonized tone and the unaccustomed rough handling, for Jessie is shaking the child wildly, he lifts his head and again opens his eyes.

"Come! come! get up, Bertie! We must run fast for our lives."

"Two bwave chums,
See — how — they wun,"

the boy murmurs. But Jessie's next call to him is in a breaking sob, and Bertie, now more thoroughly awake, starts up with, "Is it the bugglers? Don't ky; I take care oo. I kill 'em wiz my gun. Quick! quick! Dessie, get my gun!"

"No, no; it's not burglars. The house is on fire; and Bertie must be brave, and come with me on to the roof. Papa has told me often if there was a fire to go to the roof. Here! quick! put your feet into these overshoes, and here is your fur coat. No! no! there's no time for anything else. Now give me your hand, and — and don't be frightened at the smoke. We'll soon be out of it, — on the roof, you know."

The next moment, as the blinding column of smoke meets them, he gives a sharp cry; but as he feels his sister's arms about him, a sense of security takes possession of him, even though he is half strangling and suffocating in his efforts to breathe. Up, up the steep stairs the girl presses with her burden. Once or twice she stumbles and nearly falls, but she gains her feet again. Every step is a flight and a fight for life, and

every step is winged with fear, for behind her the pursuing smoke gathers power and volume, and from below an ominous, hissing, crackling sound makes itself heard with terrible distinctness. The stairs are not many, but they are irregular and winding; for the house is an old-fashioned residence remodelled into an apartment-house. The passage is also narrow and partly shut in, and it is not until almost at the very top that the free breath of heaven is felt. Thus blindly groping her way along the winding turns, it seemed to poor Jessie that she should never reach the end. The swift-flying moments were like lagging hours; and the last few steps, blindly taken, brought a despairing cry to her lips. And then it was that another step, another turn, and suddenly full in her face she felt the night wind blow, and her heart leaped up with one great throb of relief. They were safe, for one more step and they were on the roof. The fresh air aroused Bertie, and brought back something of his confidence, so that he was quite willing to be set upon his feet, and take his sister's hand. As he did so he glanced

up at the broad expanse of sky, which at the height he stood appeared to him very near, and he said to his sister, in a cheerful little voice, —

"Dessie, are we doin' up to heaven?"

Jessie did not answer, for just then a burst of smoke at the stairway opening they had left, warned her to hasten from a double danger; for she had heard and read enough of fires to know that the fireman's hose might presently not only drench but beat them down.

Easy enough in that first moment of relief as her future progress seemed, it was not long before the height and solitariness, the strangeness of the whole situation, began to oppress her with doubt and question. Why did she not meet others who had fled to the house-top as she had for safety? Almost as she asked herself this question there flashed into her mind two facts that she had forgotten. Their neighbors who occupied the rest of the upper floor were absent, and the floor below had an escape directly communicating from the hall-way to the lower roof of another block extending in the opposite direction, — westward, instead of eastward.

These were, indeed, appalling facts to a girl of thirteen, wise and womanly as she was in many things, and accustomed to facing difficulties. What should she do? She could not turn back, that was certain; and if she kept on, what then? In the other direction numbers of persons no doubt were in force together. They would make themselves heard. They were very likely from the first observed and even assisted by the firemen, for she recollected now that the escape was said to be broad and easy from that lower floor. But who would assist her? How should she make herself heard? All the time that these questions were agitating her mind, she was slowly and carefully going forward, leading Bertie by the hand. The little fellow had accepted the situation at first with the healthy composure that was luckily a part of his character. He had too, at the first, been rather pleased, though a little awed, at the novelty of walking on the house-tops, — "so near heaven," as he put it. But mild as the night was, it was a winter night; and he presently began to feel the frosty air, for his sister had had only time to slip his feet into a pair of wool-lined overshoes,

and to put over his little trouser night-gown the new white fur coat that had been one of his Christmas presents. But he had none of his usual warm under-clothing, no stout leggings or stockings, and his head was quite uncovered.

"Bertie's cold," he said at last.

"Yes, sister knows; but Bertie must be brave. Two brave chums, you know," the poor girl cried, as cheerfully as she could.

The boy didn't take up the refrain. His little cold fingers closed more tightly about his sister's, and presently he asked, in a tearful voice, "Why don't we get dare?"

"Get where?" inquired Jessie, trying to speak lightly.

"To heaven. Can't oo find er stairs?"

Jessie shuddered. Oh, what if — A sob rose in her throat at the thought that was suggested to her. What, what should she do? Could her voice be heard if she cried out at such a height? She stopped and looked backward. She could see a thin stream of water forcing down a little cloud of smoke, but no sight, as she

had hoped, of a human being, — no fireman or workman of any kind. It did not occur to her that the wind was blowing from the east, driving the smoke westward, and that every one's energies were employed in that direction. What *could* she do? At this crisis Bertie's voice arose in a pitiful wail, and stooping, she lifted him in her arms. As his soft, cold cheek touched her own, the sob in her throat broke its bonds. The child looked up in amazement. What! his Dessie crying! This was an unexampled thing, and for a moment he did not know how to take it. Then the noble little soul forgot his own discomfort, his own terrors, in his love and pity, and straightening up, he put his arms about his Dessie's neck, and said to her, —

"Don't ky; Bertie take care Dessie." A resounding kiss sealed this promise. Under the influence of words and kiss Jessie's heart entirely overflowed, and the tears she had restrained burst forth. At sight of these tears Bertie struggled down upon his feet, and caught her hand, crying, "Come, come with Bertie!" And half mechanically she again went forward, almost led

by the small, tight-clinging hand. It was only a few moments after that she was startled by a sudden, shrill cry from the boy, "Hark! Hark! dey's a-singin'! Bertie's foun' er stairs!"

Yes; the child was right. There was certainly a sound of singing somewhere not far away. Where? What could it be? Following the sound, a few steps led them around a tall chimney, and there Jessie saw before her a glimmering of light. A step or two farther showed her whence it came, and from whence, also, came the sound of singing. The skylight window of a roof had been flung back, and from the hall-way just below, the bright radiance from a gas jet streamed up and out, and from some lower floor floated up to them the gay little holiday carol: —

"Run, run, run,
Before the sun
Can catch us here,
Can snatch us here,
And meet the year, —
The young new year.
Run, run, run,
Before the sun."

The two children had flung themselves down at once by the open skylight; and Bertie, peeping over, laughed aloud as he listened. Then catching the words, —

"Run, run, run,"

at the end, he laughed again, and suddenly sang out, lustily, —

"Two bwave chums,
See how they wun!"

A house-maid coming up the stairs into the hall just below, stopped, startled at this unexpected sound. Where in the world could it be? Bertie saw the startled look with delight, and straightway sang the couplet again. The girl lifted her head, and caught sight of the childish face framed by the short rings of golden hair, which the gas-light illuminated into something seraphic. For a moment she held her breath in awe-struck amazement; then she exclaimed, "It 's a little angel, sure!"

"No, 't ain't; it 's Bertie," the boy cried, impatient now to be taken down into the warmth and shelter

of a home, — "it 's Bertie and Dessie too. We 've wunned away from the fire. Tum, tum up and help us down; we 're f'eezin'."

Jessie, now leaning forward, joined in the explanation, and made the matter clearer to the girl, whose astonishment broke out in loud exclamations. "What is it? What 's the matter, Jane?" a voice inquired.

"Matter! Look here, sir! Did you ever know the like of this?" and Jane turned to the master of the house, who overheard her wondering cries.

The master of the house was almost as much astonished when he saw the children's faces, and heard the explanation of their presence, as the maid had been; but his astonishment did not interfere with his action as it did with hers, for immediately upon comprehending the case, he sprang up the steps, and lifted Bertie in his arms, at the same time telling Jane to bring the little girl along. Into a luxurious room, full of warmth and soft shaded light, the children were taken, greatly to the surprise of the occupants, — a group of four or five persons who were at the moment engaged

in animated conversation. But the conversation ceased at the sight of the new-comers. Bertie, in his white coat, with its fringes of snowy Astrachan, was a charming object. His eyes were now shining like stars, his cheeks flushed, and the ruffled yellow curls made a sort of golden halo around his face.

"And you came alone all this way, — you two on the tops of the houses? Oh, it makes me dizzy!" cried a tall young lady who had taken Jessie's cold hand, and was drawing her to the open grate fire. With this movement, Jessie was brought forward into the light; and as she lifted her head a little soft shout arose from a shaded corner, and then out of the corner, limping on a small crutch, came hurrying a slender sprite of a girl, crying, —

"Oh, Mamma! oh, Eleanor! they are my friends! — my friends that I used to watch at the window for! Don't you see? I didn't know the little boy at first in his white coat. But they are my friends — my friends — and oh, my New-Year's callers!"

"What does she mean?" asked Mr. Patterson,



"Oh, Mamma! oh, Eleanor! they are my friends!" — *Page 152.*

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in a low voice, of his wife; and Mrs. Patterson explained.

"But is n't it wonderful," cried Theodora, as she clung to Jessie, "that you should come down to me like this instead of in at the door, and on New-Year's night, too? It 's like a gift from Heaven."

Neither Mrs. Patterson nor Eleanor thought of restraining Theodora's enthusiasm at this moment. They were touched and moved out of all petty considerations for that moment, and moved also with not a little admiration, as Jessie simply and modestly told the story of her escape. In this story her hearers learned something of the life of the family, — the limited means, the father's love and care, and his young daughter's efficiency. But Mr. Patterson discovered something more than these facts, as he questioned the daughter about her father, — his name and occupation, etc., — with a view to communicating with him as soon as possible, and thus saving him from unnecessary anxiety in regard to his children's welfare. What this "something more" was did not, however,

transpire until later, for Mr. Patterson was a man of few words; but his wife, who noted the look of deeper interest that suddenly came into her husband's face as Jessie answered one of his questions, said to herself, "I think very likely this Henry Hamlin was once a clerk of Patterson & Co." She was almost certain of this presently, and was quite assured of it when he bade the children good-night, and bending to kiss the slumbering Bertie, said, "Well, we must take good care of these little Hamlins."

And very good care indeed was taken of them. Mr. Patterson was full of kindness and consideration. He got from Gregerson & Co. — the firm that employed Mr. Hamlin — all the points at which he would be likely to stop on his Western trip, and telegraphed to every point of the safety of the children. And so the days went by, — happy days for Theodora, and happy days for Jessie and Bertie, though a little thread of anxiety ran through Jessie's enjoyment, until Papa was heard from. After that her heart was easier; and when Papa himself followed his messages, her joy was com-

plete. "Though everything is burned up, Papa — everything but Bertie and me," she said pathetically.

"'But Bertie and me'?" repeated Mr. Hamlin, betwixt smiles and tears, as he thought how "Bertie and me" made the whole world a treasure-house to him.

"And Bertie took care Dessie. Dessie ky, and Bertie foun' er stairs for her," exclaimed the boy, in a triumphant tone. And then over again Jessie had to tell the story of that wonderful walk across the roofs.

It was that night after Mr. Hamlin's return that Eleanor, finding her father alone, said to him, "Mr. Hamlin is quite a gentlemanly person, is n't he, Papa?"

"Oh, quite so," answered Mr. Patterson, absently, turning his newspaper to the light.

"And Jessie seems a nice girl, — well taught and quite well brought up."

"Yes."

"Papa, I want you to listen to me a few moments."

Mr. Patterson laid down his newspaper with some surprise. "Yes, my dear; what is it?"

"Mamma and I have a little plan. Theodora has taken a great fancy to Jessie, and the girl is very good to her, and we — Mamma and I — have wondered whether it would n't be a good thing all round to engage Jessie, if we could, for a sort of young companion for Theodora, to read to her and help her with her studies. We thought it would be an assistance to Mr. Hamlin too, for Mamma says his losses must come rather hard upon him. Then another thing, Papa; it would perhaps save embarrassment in the future by putting matters at once into their proper relations."

"Proper relations? What do you mean?"

"Well, you know what Theodora is, — her enthusiasms. She is ready to make friends with anybody she fancies. She has no idea whatever of the world and its social relations, and by and by, when she grows up and gets stronger, she will take such a different place in society from this young girl, that — that —" The tall, beautiful Eleanor stopped, stammering at something she saw in her father's expression. When this expression merged into a sarcastic laugh, a bright

red blush mounted to the young lady's face. "But, Papa," she began again, deprecatingly.

"But, my dear," he interrupted, "Theodora's unworldly instincts, her — you must excuse me — finer tastes, have served her better than your worldly ones. You said that Mr. Hamlin was quite a gentlemanly person; he ought to be, if a fine education and early advantages mean anything, for Henry Hamlin is the grandson of Anthony Hamlin, who started and *made* the great firm of Gregerson & Co. It used to be Hamlin & Gregerson. When Anthony Hamlin died he left a million or more to his only son. This son, the father of Henry, sold out his interest in the firm, and went abroad to live. When *he* died, it was found that extravagance and bad management had reduced the big fortune to a pittance; and thus thrown on their own resources, his sons had to go to work, — to begin at the bottom of the ladder, as their grandfather had done; but I'm afraid without his shrewdness."

A flash of memory, and there came into Eleanor's mind Theodora's words that her mother had repeated

to her, "Perhaps, their father now is just as Grandpa Patterson was once, — he has n't got to the top, and can't give his children much care."

The color deepened in Eleanor's cheeks at her father's next words, "You say that Theodora has no idea of the world and its social relations. I am very glad that she has n't your idea. It is a poor idea anywhere; but it's a very silly idea in this country, where such class distinctions are at variance with the very structure of the government, instead of being upheld by it, as in the older countries. Why, my child, America is a country that is built up in every particular, socially as well as in other ways, by work, — the successful work of brains and business enterprise, and to ignore this is simply ridiculous; and for you, whose father happens to be prosperous to-day on the foundation that *his* father laid from a very small beginning, to set yourself — "

"But, Papa, Papa, I see now that I've made a great mistake; what you've told me alters the case. If I had known, of course, that Mr. Hamlin — "

"If you had known that Mr. Hamlin was the grandson of Anthony Hamlin! Oh, Eleanor, I want you to cultivate something of that spirit that Theodora has, which you call unworldliness, and *I* call perception, that will enable you to see for yourself what people are, in spite of mere external circumstances. It seems, — well, it seems to me, my dear, vulgar in you not to be able to do so."

The tears were in Eleanor's eyes and in her throat, and her cheeks were burning red by this time. She began to speak, "Papa, I did n't mean —" and then her voice broke, and the next moment she was kneeling beside her father's chair, and his arm was around her, and her head upon his shoulder.

"I know, my dear, you did n't mean to be, for you did n't think you could be, vulgarly worldly. But, Eleanor, it is your great fault, and — I must say it — it keeps you from being quite a lady."

"Oh, Papa!"

"Yes, my dear; but don't cry over it. Do something better. Try to see things differently. Start

with the New Year, and with Theodora's New-Year's callers for hint and suggestion. To think" — and Mr. Patterson's voice took on a lighter tone — "that a bright girl like you could have made such a mistake, — could have thought for a moment that these Hamlins were of an inferior position because they lived out of *your* world, and that you could engage Henry Hamlin's young daughter at so much per week to coach Theodora in her studies. Oh, Eleanor!"

JENNY'S LARK.



JENNY sat in one corner of the great family sitting-room, bending her curly head over her slate, and trying very hard to keep her mind upon the long column of figures before her. But this was n't very easy, when Frank and Charley and Grace and Alice, at the other end of the room, were laughing and talking and planning such delightful things.

At their end of the room it was all so gay with gas-light and fire-light and bright colors; for, it being a rainy evening, Grace and Alice had betaken themselves to the sitting-room to hurry on the making of their pretty new dresses which the dressmaker had left that afternoon. There was the pale blue silk for

the blonde Grace, and the pink crêpe, with all those white puffs, for brunette Alice. No wonder Miss Jenny, over in her corner, was distracted and disturbed away from her column of figures by this fascinating brightness and dazzle.

"Five and two are seven, and three are — eight, nine, ten," she would say to herself, counting her fingers diligently in the effort to get it right; and just as she had got so far, perhaps, swish, swish, Grace's scissors would go, cutting into the silk trimming, and Alice would hold up her beautiful robe, and make some exclamation about the party next week, when these beautiful fineries were to be worn.

Grace and Alice were by no means little girls like Jenny. They were two grown-up young ladies, of sixteen and eighteen. Beautiful tall young ladies they were, whom Jenny — this little Jenny of eight — always thought of, though they were her sisters, as lovely princesses, whenever they were made ready for a ball or party.

She forgot for the moment her "five and two are

seven, and three are ten," to plunge into these usual fairy thoughts of hers, as Grace flung a sash of the blue silk over her shoulder, and cried, —

"Oh, it 's to be a perfect scene of enchantment! the rooms are to be decorated with flowers, and there is to be a hidden band of music; and outside, the grounds are to be lighted up with colored lanterns!"

At this, Jenny's column of figures vanished completely, and in their stead she saw this scene of enchantment, with its lanterns and its flowers, and heard the mysterious music. She was recalled to reality very sharply by the dropping of her slate-pencil. Bang, snap, it went upon the floor, the beautiful long pencil she had bought that very evening. Oh, dear! it was too bad to have fairy vision and real treasure break in one breath. If Jenny did not give utterance to just this, she thought what amounted to the same thing, as her long-drawn sigh indicated. At that sigh Grace paused and looked across at her.

"What is Jenny doing?" she asked of her brother.

"'Doing' her sums," answered Frank, with a laugh.

Those long rows of figures had no terrors for a young collegian. But Grace had n't forgotten the days when she too had bent over her slate and found the long rows of figures very trying; so she said softly and entreatingly, —

"Go and help her, Frank, that 's a good fellow."

And presently Jenny, who was counting her fingers over those fives and tens in a very disconsolate manner, heard Frank's cheery voice so close to her ear that she fairly jumped.

Ah, it was another thing now. A minute ago Jenny had compared herself to Cinderella, sitting away in her corner, while the two beautiful sisters were preparing for the ball. Now, with Frank by her side, — Frank, who was like a young prince in her eyes, — she forgot all her Cinderella thoughts, and even the broken slate-pencil; and the fives and twos and threes added up like magic under Prince Frank's eyes and in his helpful company. Like magic, and it did n't seem a minute before the dreaded sums were all done, the slate put aside, and she was sitting in the midst of the lightness and dazzle, gath-

ering up bits of blue silk and pink crêpe and white lace for dolls' dresses, and listening to Grace and Alice's talk, and Frank and Charley's college stories. Kind, beautiful Grace was the fairy princess, and Frank the fairy prince who had wrought this magic change.

You see we do not have to go back into the old days for the kind fairies who perform kind deeds; we have them with us always, and when any need comes up, they appear to us with the magic wands of sympathy and love, and straightway we are helped and cheered and comforted.

Jenny did not reason this out in the manner that I have; but she felt quite satisfied and happy in the general result, which I am sure is all that any fairy, ancient or modern, ought to expect. Not the least part of Jenny's happiness on this occasion consisted in the gay fancies and air-castles which thronged and built in her little brain, as Grace and Alice talked about the coming splendors.

Oh, how she wished she could go too, — could just take one peep at such a fairy-land, and listen for a minute or two to the lovely music!

But what was that that Charley was saying?

"It will only be a big party, that's all; not half so jolly as a lark we fellows had last Monday."

"A lark!" What in the world was that? What could it be that was nicer than Grace and Alice's parties?

"What is it, Charley? What is 'a lark'?" she asked, when there was pause enough in the chatter for her to wedge in a word.

Charley laughed.

"A lark? Oh, it's a sudden jolly time, got up in a minute, without any fuss, such as you girls make for your parties. We don't stop for our ruffles and frills and furbelows," laughing still more; "we go as we did the other night, when Jim Mason drove down with the old sorrel horse harnessed into the hay-cart. We did n't take two minutes to think about it, but jumped right in and were off before you could say Jack Robinson. Did n't we have a gay time, though! Went clear to Masonville; and Jim got a lot of his acquaintances together, and we all went into the new barn and had a dance, and a

feast of pie and doughnuts afterward. That's what I call a lark, Jen. Better 'n all the parties *you* 'll ever go to."

"There's something else that belongs to your 'lark' that's not quite so nice," broke out Grace here, in a tone that made Jenny look toward her curiously. She knew by this tone that there was something in the lark that Grace did n't like.

"Something else, not quite so nice as the ride and the dance and the pie and the doughnuts," Grace concluded.

"Go ahead! A girl always has to bring in the moral, and top off with a lecture," cried out Master Charley.

"No, I sha'n't go ahead," returned Grace, coolly; "but I see you know what I mean."

"Oh, what is it?" eagerly asked Jenny. "Did he fall out of the wagon; did the doughnuts make him sick?"

Charley shouted, and even Grace joined in the general merriment at this.

"No, Jen, I did n't fall out of the wagon, and I did n't come to grief with the doughnuts. I'll tell you what Grace means," began Charley, as soon as he could speak. "She means that I was a naughty boy; that I went off

without saying a word to anybody, and stayed so late that Father and Mother were frightened and thought I was drowned. Grace says I was selfish and all that sort of thing, because I went off in a hurry and forgot to tell anybody I was going. She says that spoiled the lark, to her mind. And now you have Madame Grace's sermon all cut and dried."

"Well, I do think thoughtlessness like that, forgetting other people's comfort entirely, is the worst kind of selfishness. I don't see how boys can go on so heedlessly. I'm sure girls would never think of taking matters into their own hands, and going against rules and orders like that!" said Grace very seriously.

"Oh, well, girls are girls, and boys are boys," was Charley's only reply to this.

He seemed to think he had settled the question by this remark; but here Alice, who was a lark herself, she was so merry and bright, came out with, —

"Oh, you need n't talk in that grand way, as if you thought it was an evidence of smartness and superiority for boys to go and do disagreeable, selfish things, that set everybody by the ears. It may be roguish, but it is n't

manly roguishness. It 's the worst part of a boy, not his best part. Guess you would n't like it better 'n anybody, Master Charley. How you felt when you lost your little ugly rat terrier for two days! My! the house could n't hold you. And once I saw you mopping your face with your pocket-handkerchief, *as if your eyes troubled you!* Now, s'posin' you 'd been a man, and it had been your little boy, instead of your little pug-nosed, flat-faced terrier, how 'd you have felt then?"

"Well, I ain't a man, and I have n't any little boy, so I can't decide. But as I *have* got the handsomest Scotch terrier there is anywhere about, I do object to his being abused and called names," responded Charley, with that easy good-humor which not even his own ill-doings and Alice's glib tongue could upset. They all laughed at this cool and easy turning off; and then the evening came to a close, for Jenny at least, for suddenly Grace caught her winking very hard, and cried out, —

"What are we thinking of? Why, it 's more than an hour past that child's bedtime!"

And the next thing, Jenny was whisked off in Grace's

arms; and the next thing after that she was fast asleep, and dreaming, perhaps, of the fairy princess in the beautiful, lighted garden, or perhaps of Charley's lark, when he danced in the barn, and feasted on pies and doughnuts. But the princesses, I am sure, were uppermost, and, sleeping or waking, for the next few days her small head was full of them. The weather, however, soon became the great subject of anxiety, for, June though it was, the evening damps and fogs had been so chill that fires had to be kindled on the hearths and in the grates at morning and nightfall.

"What 'll become of all those fine lanterns if it rains?" Charley would ask, rather aggravatingly.

"But it won't rain, — I am sure it won't; so you may just spare your croak," Alice would reply, very decidedly.

And it did n't rain. There was not even a fog to veil the brightness of that lovely June twilight. It was a wedding-party, so the guests were bidden early; and Jenny had the pleasure of seeing the princesses don all their finery and drive away in state.

All the neighborhood seemed to be going, too; and over

the fences and the gates the maid-servants talked to one another about it. Jenny watched the whirl of the carriages until she was tired, and then she began to notice the little groups of people on foot who were hurrying by on the plank walk.

"Where are you going?" she called out to an acquaintance, a girl two or three years older than herself.

"To see the lighted gardens and to hear the music," was the answer.

So, then, all these people were going to that scene of enchantment; and they were not bidden any more than she!

Away went Jenny, with a new thought, in search of Mary Malony, the nurse-maid; but Mary was off with Bridget, the cook. They were following the fashion of their neighbors in chatting over somebody's doorway.

"Oh dear, what shall I do?" sighed Jenny.

She wandered through the deserted house, for even Papa and Mamma had gone to the wedding. All at once she came upon Nicholas, the coachman, mending his carriage harness.

"Oh, Nicholas, dear, good Nicholas, go up on the bluff with me to see the lighted gardens and hear the music!" she cried out breathlessly.

Nicholas stopped a minute, and looked at the little flushed, eager face. "I can't, Missy," he said, as if he were very sorry for her sake that he could n't; "it 'll take me all the time till I have to go up and fetch the rest of 'em, to mend this. I like to got throwed out comin' back, all along o' this break in the strap."

"Oh, what shall I do?" sighed Jenny again. As if to answer her question, there, across the way, hanging over *her* gate, was Nelly Slade. In a minute more the children were consulting together, and in a minute more again they were hurrying up the plank walk in the beautiful June moonlight.

"I must get back before Mother does," said Nelly, anxiously, on the way.

"Why?"

"'Why?' well, because she 'd be worried, you know, and would n't like my going out so late with another little girl."

Then for the first time our Jenny began to think what *she* was about. She had forgotten everything before but her own pleasure; and in a moment she bethought herself of Charley. That was just what *he* did in his lark, — it was the wrong part of his lark, Grace had said. But she could n't turn back now, for oh! there shone the lovely gold and red and green and purple lights, and oh! there sounded the beautiful music.

What mortal little girl but would have forgotten everything else in such delights?

There was a crowd of people already in the grounds, — the unbidden guests who, one by one and two by two, had been led on by the alluring stories of the lighted gardens and the music, to see what they could see, and hear what they could hear.

What a scene it was to such fairy-loving eyes as Jenny's! — those great bubbles of colored flame, like brilliant flowers of the night, swaying and winking from the trees, and lighting up every bank and bower.

"Oh, isn't it just like a story, Nelly, exactly? And oh, hear the music! But I want to see the princess, don't you?"

"What princess?" asked matter-of-fact Nelly, looking at Jenny as if she thought she had suddenly taken leave of her senses.

Jenny laughed.

"Oh, I meant the bride, you know. I always call her the Princess May, because she is just like the Princess May in the story-book I lent you; she is so beautiful, with all those curls the color of a gold ring, and her shining eyes and her pretty smile. But oh, come here, come here, Nelly! let's climb up on this arbor, and we can look straight in at the window!"

Up they went, with many a scramble and a scratch. But what did Jenny care for that when she was to be rewarded with a sight of her Princess May? Up they went, and alighted like two little birds at last upon the top of a low arbor, from which perch they had a full view of the interior of the drawing-room, — a full view of Papa and Mamma and Grace and Alice, and





"Sitting there upon her perch she quite forgot the time." — *Page 175*.

the beautiful Princess May, as she stood receiving the congratulations of her guests; a full view of the great room, with all the pictures and the doorways framed in with flowers and drooping vines; a full view of the great throng of people, moving hither and thither, and looking, in their brilliant colors, like a parterre of flowers swept by a summer wind. And the mysterious band of music sent forth its sweet, gay strains; violins and flutes and drums tinkling and playing and beating, till Jenny was wild with excitement.

Sitting there upon her perch she quite forgot the time, — that it was growing later and later every minute, and that the early moon had slipped away and left everything outside of the garden illuminations dark as dark could be. She forgot all these things, and how she was to get home, until somebody came to one of the windows and cried out,—

"Oh, what a crowd of people! Why, it's a regular invasion!"

It was like the clock striking twelve in the old Cin-

derella legend, for suddenly everything was over to our little modern Cinderella; for, following the tones of that voice, came another voice from the lawn, addressing the people and begging them to disperse, as their occupation of the grounds interfered with the enjoyment of the invited guests. This voice sounded very familiar to Jenny. It sounded just like her father's. She stretched forward. She stood tiptoe, and as one of the lanterns, a great blue bell of flame, swung out, she saw a face as familiar as the voice. Her father, as sure as the world!

"Run, Jenny, or your father will see you," said one of the girls beside her.

"Run! I guess I sha'n't," retorted Jenny, indignantly; "it 's mean to run."

And so, instead of running, Jenny jumps up and calls out, —

"Oh, Papa! Papa!"

Mr. Raymond came towards her in amazement.

"Why, Jenny, what does this mean? How came you here?" he asked in a grave, displeased tone.

"Oh, everybody was coming, Papa, and the house was all alone 'cept Nicholas, and Nicholas could n't come, so I come up with Nelly Slade and lots of other people."

"But, Jenny, you had no right to come up here uninvited and without permission, and at such an hour too. Don't you know you 've done very wrong? Here," without waiting for Jenny to answer, "jump in here, — now, Nicholas," as the two children obeyed him and clambered into the carriage which had just rolled up the avenue, "take these children home as soon as possible."

"To think of your taking that walk with only Nelly Slade at nine o'clock in the evening," said Grace at the breakfast-table next morning. "What *did* you do so for, Jenny?"

"A lark," answered Jenny, looking suddenly across at Charley.

Charley shouted.

"Well, it *was* a real out-and-out lark, I must say; and now you 'll never have to ask me for another explanation of one, Miss Jen."

"Yes; but Jenny is n't going to make the mistake of forgetting to wait for permission on another lark, is she?" asked Grace, who was rather mortified at the turn of affairs.

"Not if I can remember," answered Jenny, innocently.

And at this the whole family joined in Charley's shout of laughter.

Out of this laughter Papa turned with a bright look toward his youngest daughter and said, —

"There is *one* thing I can trust Jenny for, — she 'll own up to her lark, whatever it may be. There 's no sneak about her. She won't wait to be found out, and then hide behind somebody else. *That 's* proved, anyway."

SALLY GREEN'S CLAM-BAKE PARTY.



HEN Sally Green came home from school three years ago, she brought with her a good many of the fancies and ideas that girls are very apt to bring from boarding-school. Her father called them "foolish notions;" but at the same time he did n't "put his foot down" very hard upon them, and allowed Sally to have "her swing," as Sally's brother Tom declared, without much protest.

But by and by Sally proposed something that brought the foot down very emphatically. This was a party, — a fashionable party, with Reed's quadrille band to be sent from the city, and all the other adjuncts of hothouse flowers, elaborate supper, and no end of German favors.

"It 's of no use, Sally," Mr. Green replied to this plan. "In the first place, I can't afford such parties; and I don't approve of them anyway. Then I don't bring your mother down here to have such dissipated doings. She needs rest, Miss Sally, if you don't."

"But, Papa, if I might only — "

"No use, Sally; I know all your argument. You 'll take all the trouble, and all that. But if I liked it as well as you do, I could n't have it. I have n't five hundred dollars, Sally, to spend for amusement."

"Five hundred dollars! Papa Green, what *are* you thinking of?"

Papa Green jotted down on the back of a letter a detail of hard facts, — a list of the luxuries which go to make up a fashionable party, and handed it over to Sally. Sally ran her eye over these items, and the big figures attached, and still looked incredulous; but Tom, coming in just then, — Tom, who was always ready for any frolic, — declared at once, upon examining the big figures, that of course you could n't get up such a swell party for less than five hundred dollars.

"Why, the party our class gave last year cost every cent of four hundred and fifty dollars; and we had a very poor show of flowers at that, Sally."

Sally knew then that *her* swell party must go under. The facts were too much for the fancy.

"Any small, unpretentious gathering, Sally, I 'm perfectly willing you should have."

But Sally, remembering the visions she had conjured up of a forest of flowers and a quadrille band, did not receive this proposition of her father's with rapture, by any means.

One of Sally's "foolish notions" was that her father must be a rich man, because last year he had bought a pretty summer residence on the Narragansett Bay shore. Sally could n't understand that it was a matter of economy, — that it costs less to live in this manner under one's own vine and fig-tree (especially where the vine and fig-tree meant a productive vegetable-garden) than it does to take the needed summer change of air and scene junketing about at boarding-houses and hotels, where the rooms and the prices are of the most elevated de-

scription. Sally had always associated the grand sound of "summer residence" with a villa at Newport or a cottage at Long Branch. When she first saw the pretty, inexpensive house her father had purchased, the airy piazzas, the little filigree wood-work here and there, and the swinging pots of flowers at once suggested to Sally an immense idea of future possibilities as to entertainments, — garden-parties and all that.

To Sally's inexperienced eye, the showy filigree-work, the airy piazzas, the airy rooms, the swinging pots of flowers, were all suggestive of Newport magnificences. And here was her first attempt at putting this suggestion into practical effect nipped in the bud. The shadow of disappointment was on her face for a whole day. It might have lingered still longer but for Tom's brilliant idea.

He came home that very night, and flung it like a gay little sky-rocket at Sally's feet. And Sally jumped at it a good deal as she might if it had been an actual rocket.

"Sally, I'll tell you what you can do," he said. "You can have a clam-bake party. It 's just the thing on this

shore. Gentlemen are constantly giving them from the shore club-houses, and I don't see why a lady should n't lead the way in one. Nicholas" — Nicholas was the "hired man," a Rhode Islander, who had dug clams, and assisted in that great Rhode Island specialty, clam-baking, since he put on his first pair of boots — "Nicholas and one of his forty brothers will get it all up for you, and you can slip in the feminine fine-art touches, and so make a unique affair of it that will beat the man-parties out and out."

Sally forgot she was a proper young woman of seventeen as she jumped up from her chair and whirled Tom about in a wild waltz.

"Tom, you 're a love!" she cried, as soon as she caught her breath. "I 'll just make the prettiest, the most original party in the world. My 'prophetic soul' paints it now, in a vivid picture. I shall send out invitations written on tinted paper, with a clam-shell sketched in monogram. A day-party, too! everybody can come and go by boat from the city if they wish, and the carriage-comers can take their own time. Oh, Tom, Tom!

you've saved my life. Already disappointment was 'preying like a worm i' the bud upon my damask cheek!'"

And with this gay travesty Sally fled to her mother to arrange other details.

"You can send out as many invitations as you care to write, Sally," said her father, pleasantly, when the project was laid before him. "An out-door party, as simple as a clam-bake party must be, does n't involve much expense."

So Sally set herself at work over those unique invitations. Her pen flew, and the result was most artistic, for Sally's sole accomplishment, or talent, was this gift of sketching. Then her father got so interested he lent a hand, and helped Nicholas Beane and "one of his forty brothers" to put up two or three long tables on the grass-plat at the west of the house. And over this pretty awnings were stretched; and Sally rummaged the neighborhood for flowers and vines to decorate both awnings and tables.

The day of the party turned out to be all that a day

should be, clear and sunny, with a brisk breeze; and at the early hour specified in the invitations, the guests began to arrive, most of them coming by some one of the numerous boats that ply up and down the river and bay.

There were half a dozen of Sally's recent school-mates who came up from Newport, — Boston girls, who were in a great glee and curiosity over what they had heard so much of in Rhode Island. You see it was their first season at Newport, and they had not as yet been up to famous Rocky Point to a clam-bake.

But Sally drew in her breath when she saw that Milly Warde had her cousin Winthorp Warde with her, a Harvard student, who had the reputation of being very fastidious and very satirical. She had uncomfortable recollections of overhearing him call her "little Rhode Island" in a quizzical way once, and very likely he would make fun of her Rhode Island party when he went back to Newport.

"Well, let him," said Sally, with sudden spirit, to herself.

"Win *would* come. He said he was sure you 'd invite him if you had known he was visiting us," was Milly Warde's introductory, and Sally smiled and made the usual cordial response.

But she did n't at all like the way in which this elegant gentleman walked about, with that *amused* look in his eyes, and the tone in which he would say, as he regarded the tables, the awnings, etc., "Oh, very pretty! Yes, very pretty, — very neat."

If Sally had read Mr. Howells' "Chance Acquaintance" she would have called Mr. Winthrop Warde "Mr. Arbuton," in all probability, though it is doubtful if Mr. Arbuton would have condescended to amusement.

But Sally was fated to conquer everything on this day, not only her own annoyance, but the quizzical spirit of this formidable Mr. Warde. Turning to him suddenly in the midst of his rather patronizing remarks, she said with cool dignity, "If this is your first clam-bake, Mr. Warde, I suppose you would like to go down and see the manner in which it is prepared. I



"If this is your first clam-bake, Mr. Warde, I suppose you would like to go down and see the manner in which it is prepared." — *Page 186*

the fire, and the sea-weed, produced an out-door suggestiveness of freedom, a flavor of wildwood life, so entirely apart from the conventionalisms of society that Sally forgot every other atmosphere for the time, forgot she was on the defensive, as it were, with the elegant Mr. Warde, — forgot, indeed, that there was any elegant Mr. Warde, so heartily did she enter into the spirit of Nature.

In the mean time the guests were arriving in great force; and Sally, here and there and everywhere, was the very embodiment of a real girl, — what Mrs. Whitney would most emphatically have pronounced one of her "real folks." Her father, observing all this, thought that Sally was getting over her foolish notions, — thought that if she *was* his daughter, he might call her a very charming young woman.

And somebody else, observing all this, was not very far from making the same conclusion; somebody else, whom Sally had feared, as too fine and fashionable — but I am not going to anticipate. I 'm not going to tell here all that this fine Mr. Warde thought

and said of Sally. I am just going to tell now how they all trooped down to the great cairn covered with sea-weed and a rubber blanket, and watched Nicholas Beane uncover his treasures, smoking and savory and ready for the table.

In old days, say twenty years and more ago, it was quite *en règle* to cluster about in the most rural picnic fashion upon the grass, and be served thus with the smoking clams; but in these days, even if the out-door tables are not so rural, they are certainly more comfortable.

Sitting under the festooned awnings, the guests at Sally's tables wore upon their faces not only a look of comfort, but of something beyond the mere physical content; they were entering into the sweet out-door atmosphere, — the atmosphere of fields and woods and freedom. They did not miss the band of music here, for over their heads hundreds and hundreds of small musicians were on the wing, exchanging their sweetest notes.

"I never saw such a happy party," said somebody at Sally's right hand.

Sally looked up in surprise, for the somebody was Mr. Warde. In that moment she remembered all the beginning of his visit, which had slipped her mind.

"Oh, Mr. Warde!"

"Yes, I know, Miss Sally, at the first you thought I was very disagreeable and supercilious, and — and —"

"Making fun! Yes, I did!" cried Sally, impetuously.

A great, honest blush sprang to Mr. Warde's face. "No, it was n't exactly that, Miss Sally; but I thought, when Milly showed me that very pretty card of invitation, that it was to be one of those affected, swell affairs, you know, — a garden-party, with a lot of fine clothes all out of place, and a band of music, and the rest of it. I was rather staggered when I met you in this simple white dress, and — and — well, I went on being staggered in all my preconceived notions; and now I think it is the prettiest party and the most enjoyable that I ever attended, and I do hope you 'll forgive me, Miss Sally."

Quite humbly this was said, in Sally's ear. Sally laughed.

"Oh, Mr. Warde, it *is* so funny, the whole of it. I *did* want the big party, half a garden-party and half an evening-party, with a German, and a quadrille band, and hot-house flowers, and no end of fine things. But Papa could n't afford it, and Tom saved my life" — here Sally dimpled again — "by proposing a clam-bake; and I made it as pretty as I could without spoiling its simplicity. And when you came I thought you were making fun of the very simplicity, for I thought you were a — a —"

"A disagreeable swell myself; it 's only fair I should help you out as you helped me, Miss Sally;" and then they both laughed as only people can laugh out of doors under the blue sky.

It was after this that Sally began to teach Mr. Warde to eat clams, that extremely comical and extremely difficult — as far as deftness and grace is concerned — accomplishment, which yearly affords the Rhode Islander, to the manner born, such infinite jest and amusement. It is a good deal on the Jack Horner principle, — Jack "put in his thumb and pulled out a plum." And so

the Rhode Islander turns back the already loosened shell, and takes delicately with the thumb and finger, *his* plum; to wit, the succulent clam. But no written or verbal description can convey to the novice any idea of this part of the programme. All the curious, who seek knowledge in this direction, must make it a personal experience, as Mr. Warde did. And they must be sure to take their first lesson from some charming girl like Sally Green.

But a clam-bake does n't mean only a feast of clams. After the clams comes the chowder, and after the chowder, at Sally's party, came in what Tom called the fine arts, — the coffee, and a little dessert of cakes and strawberries, for it was in June, and strawberries were in their plentiful season.

And the result of all this was such a success, such a unique union of out-door unpretentiousness with taste and beauty that, from that day to this, ladies on the Rhode Island shore have vied with one another in modelling their summer gatherings upon Sally Green's clam-bake party.

And Sally dates a great deal of happiness, that came to her afterward, from this very party. The other day I heard her saying to a young friend of hers, who was fretting about the hard times, and moaning and lamenting because she could n't indulge in a great, gay party such as she had been allowed to give in the "better times," —

"My dear, it 's all stuff about big parties that follow in the beaten track of fashion, — these swell efforts that cost no end of money. People don't like you a bit better for them; and they don't have half so good a time as at the simple, informal parties. *I* know, for I thought just as you do, once, and was miserable because my father could n't afford to let me give one of these five-hundred-dollar affairs. But when I came to try another thing, — the simplest sort of thing, a clam-bake that cost just nothing to speak of, — I learned a lesson, for I found out that people don't like beaten tracks, and that they respect you for going out of them, in such matters as these, ten times as much as for your staying in them when you can't afford it. I know

that I made friends I should never have made if *I* had followed the beaten track;" and Sally smiled a little soft smile, and blushed a little tender blush at her own words, and all the memories they brought up to her.

THE END.

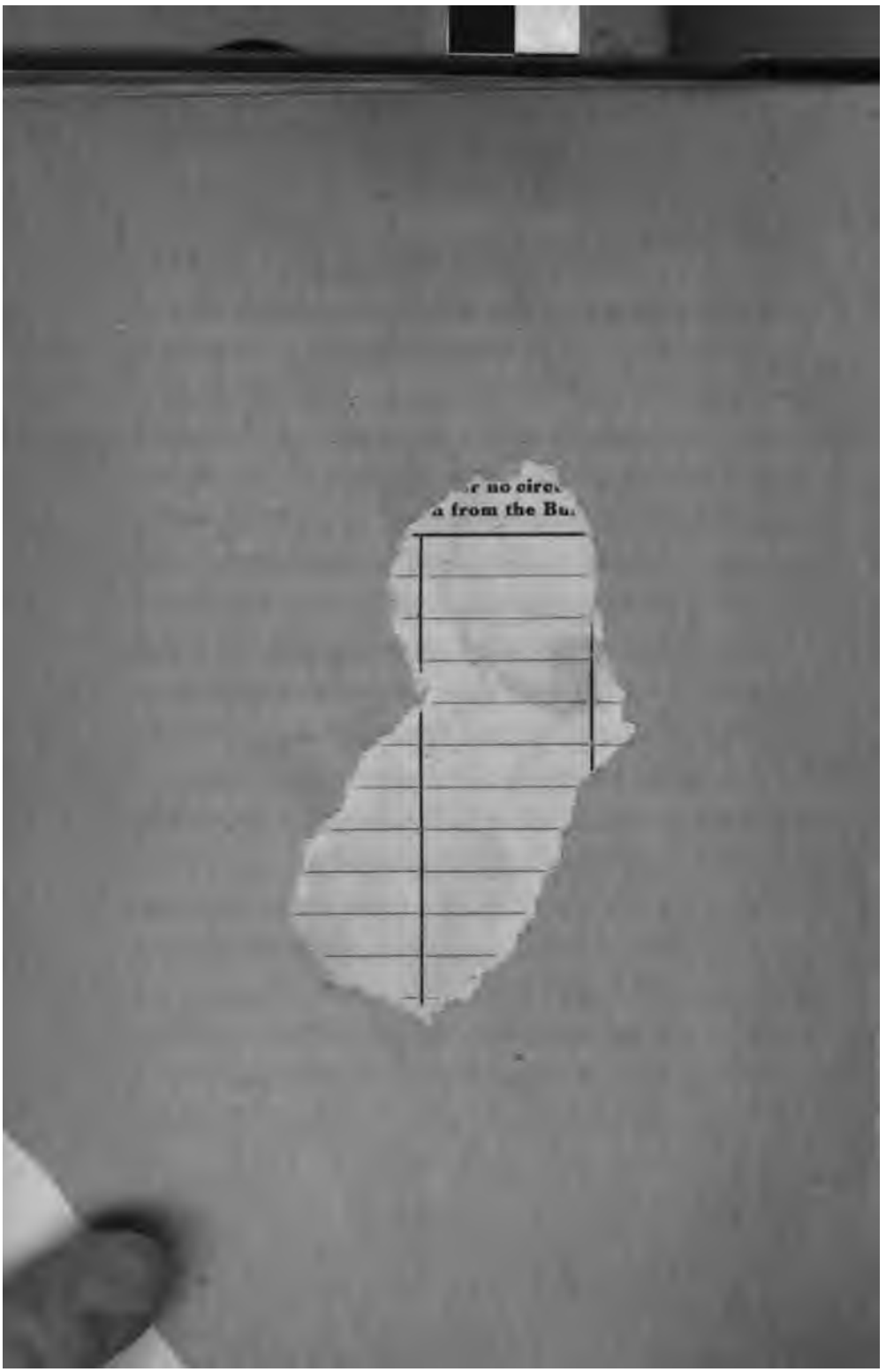











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